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APOLLO AND COLUMBIA:

LANDSCAPE AS POWER IN WASHINGTON DC AND VERSAILLES

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INTRODUCTION

A palace stands on a knoll ten miles outside of Paris. Its limestone facade is brilliant in midday, its gilded roof gleams like fire. Grand boulevards lined with plane trees radiate out in all directions from a court of marble bounded by golden gates. Here, the glory of monarchy seems to spill into the streets. It runs through massive fountains and into a mile-long canal dug by hand. It nourishes thousands of carefully pruned trees which bathe the land in deep, rich green. This place—glittering, pompous, exuberant, extravagant—is the Château de Versailles (fig. 3).

On a similar hillock, an ocean away, stands an obelisk of marble reaching high above a river plain. Visible from here are four structures of pure white, colonnaded and resolute. To the north stands a palace, to the east stands a collection of vast halls crowned by a wedding-cake dome, to the south stands an open-air Pantheon, and to the west stands a Doric temple. Complex geometries of axial streets colliding in dramatic diagonals and radiating from places of prestige tie the city beyond these four buildings together. This place—vast, grand, expensive, ornate—is Washington, District of Columbia, founded in 1790 (fig. 2).

Both places represent seats of power: Versailles is largely a stage set for monarchical glory, a platform from which Louis XIV (r. 1643–1715) would wrest power from the nobles beneath him, establishing an era of full absolutism. Washington is the result of a decades-long struggle to construct a capital befitting a rising imperialistic democracy. Enormous scales dominate, baroque lines abound, classical themes pervade, and forms evoke wealth, control, and power. The places look remarkably similar given the disparate governing systems they represented. How can this be? How

can a fledgling republic so blatantly imitate an absolutist monarch's center of power, a temple to his own glory?

Comparisons of Washington and Versailles are relatively common in urban design and garden scholarship, particularly when considering plan. Parallels between the plans of both sites are often drawn: shared Baroque geometries make their relationship evident. In "The Long Shadow of Le Nôtre," Laurie Olin asserts that Louis XIV's gardener and mastermind behind Versailles plan Andre Le Nôtre (1613-1700) had a palpable impact on not only American landscapes, but gardens and city plans across the globe. He points to Le Nôtre's intentional geometries, bold formal moves, and picture view-making as precedents for centuries of landscape and urban design, from the eighteenth century to the present day.¹ In *Grand Avenues: The Story of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.*, Scott Berg explores Versailles' impact on Washington's future planners from the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, also pointing to Le Nôtre's geometries but calling more attention to the differences between the sites than similarities.² Pamela Scott's "This Vast Empire" draws comparisons between the iconography of Washington and European precedents for the city's plan and monuments, including Versailles.³ This essay builds on Olin, Scott, and Berg's analyses, reframing their perspectives through a lens of power, scale

¹ Laurie Olin, "The Long Shadow of André Le Nôtre: Notes on the Design of Cities, Parks, and Gardens in America," *SiteLINES: A Journal of Place* 12, no. 2 (April 1, 2017): pp. 3-6, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/24896573?refreqid=search-gateway:aae598267ed5db70e93f63e195de81d7>.

² Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues: the Story of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2008).

³ Pamela Scott, "'This Vast Empire': The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848," in *Studies in the History of Art [The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991]* 30 (1991).

and iconography and elaborating on historical context and the implications of Washington and Versailles on their respective audiences.

Power, Scale, and Icon

This essay endeavors to answer the questions around Versailles and Washington's similarity with an exploration of power's production of space through scale and icon. Power as a concept has particular implications for space, landscape architecture, and building design. My research grounds itself in philosopher and political theorist Hannah Arendt's theory of power. In her book *On Violence* (1970), Arendt posits that power and violence are separate but related ideas. Power, she says, is "the human ability not just to act but to act in concert."⁴ She elaborates that it need not be a direct, physical intervention, but "the very condition enabling a group of people to think and act in terms of the means-end category."⁵ While violence and power are rarely implemented without one another, they are separate concepts with separate results and implications. Guido Parietti explains Arendt's concept as follows: "Power denotes a state people can be in, whereas violence, being a means to an end, is conceptualized as a "thing" that is done or suffered."⁶ This concept guides the research: Louis XIV and the United States not as militaristic enactors of violence but as culturally powerful—building a mythology of self and an identity of power through the landscape. Here, power is something that is *experienced*, though depictions of and references to violence are certainly implemented as a means of cultivating this experience.

⁴ Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (Harvest Books, 1970), 44.

⁵ Arendt, *On Violence*, 55.

⁶ Guido Parietti, "Arendt on Power and Violence" in *The Anthem Companion to Hannah Arendt* (Harvest Books, 1970), 2-3.

Washington and Versailles are intentionally built on monumental scales. They use size to their advantage, communicating power through grand axes and unfathomable feats of earthwork and engineering. They were not the first places to implement scale as power, and they certainly were not the last. In the fifteenth century, the Imperial City of Beijing was built as a huge, nested system of increasingly sacred spaces along a strict axis. New Delhi, India, included a ceremonial axis reminiscent of L'Enfant's grand avenue for the Capitol axis leading to the Viceroy's Palace. Even in cities like Chandigarh, India; Brasilia, Brazil, and Canberra, Australia, where modern forms replaced totalitarian-tainted historicism, monumentality prevailed.⁷

Large-scale myths, legible in the fabric of the built world, constitute a major contributor to the power of DC and Versailles. Even in light of our modern culture's emphasis on logic and reason, the power of myth and legend endures. The constructed world, according to architectural theorist Iris Aravot, is "saturated with emotional qualities." Icons and symbols generate these traits, grounded in the stories they represent. Their power depends on a sense of the collective, on connections which enable people to interpret their surroundings in a similar fashion.⁸ Washington DC and Versailles share many types of icons, among the most common being classical architectural motifs and sculptural forms. These tend to suggest immortality and strength. The interpretation of icons in DC and Versailles is vital to understanding power through design. In both places, icons and symbols combine to create a complete place with a whole mythology.

⁷ Norma Evenson, "Monumental Spaces," *Studies in the History of Art* 30 (1991): 22-28.

⁸ Iris Aravot, "Narrative-Myth and Urban Design," *Journal of Architectural Education* 49, no. 2 (1995): 79-91.

A scientific method for studying symbols is semiotics. Architectural historian and landscape designer Charles Jencks (1939–2019) brought semiotics to the forefront of architectural conversations decades ago. His ideas are vital to discussing power in design through the relationship of signifiers to the signified.⁹ Semiotics reveals multitudes about the implications of governmental power on its citizens and subjects. In the context of this research, icons and symbols will be the signifiers and their meanings in terms of mythology of place will be the signified. Denotation and connotation will also be important for interpreting symbols and icons—this way the full depth of meaning of a design element may be explored. L’Enfant’s city plan of DC, for example, denotes the Baroque plans of Paris and Rome; this form connotes a sense of grandeur, control, and massiveness. Both Versailles and DC implement imagery that signals higher powers, perpetuating an idea of divinity and immortality.¹⁰ The connotations of design around centers of power carry enormous weight, particularly in the locations included in this research.

Nuanced analysis of the cultural and political context, scale, and iconography of Versailles before the French Revolution and Washington before World War II reveals that the similarities between the two are not so superficial as one might think. The qualities of both spaces, from colossal geometries to mythologized narrative figures, speak to an ancient tradition of power through the landscape. Western empires from ancient Rome to those of the modern era and beyond have leveraged this power to their advantage; Versailles and Washington’s creators merely followed precedent, reworking

⁹ Geoffrey Broadbent, “Architects and Their Symbols.” *Built Environment* (1978-) 6, no. 1 (1980): 10–28

¹⁰ Kirk Savage, “The Self-Made Monument: George Washington and the Fight to Erect a National Memorial.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 22, no. 4 (1987): 225–42.

methods of placemaking to fit their ambitions. This capstone consists of three chapters, each exploring the context and strategies implemented at each site: Time and Place, Scale, and Icon. It concludes with an epilogue which considers the impact of landscapes of power in Washington and Versailles today, and how despite their delight they can be used as weapons in the hands of power-hungry leaders.

CHAPTER 1

TIME AND PLACE

Versailles

Louis XIV was a ruler intent on centralizing power in France. He sought to complete the work of his predecessors by purging his kingdom of any and all lingering remains of feudalism, a medieval system which gave the nobles a degree of autonomy this early modern Bourbon monarch would not tolerate. His youth was shaped by the *Fronde*, a series of civil wars (1648–1653) against the Crown which were led in part by members of the French aristocracy. As he assumed full responsibility for his kingdom in 1661 at the age of twenty-three, he endeavored to control the landowners who so willingly incited a rebellion against his reign. He sought to assure the Third Estate (commoners), the overwhelming majority of his subjects, that his reign would be one of stability, law, and order.¹¹

The Sun King's efforts at solidifying his absolutist rule culminated in two campaigns which spanned the course of his life: one of military conquest, and one of design. While almost every aspect of Louis XIV's image was carefully designed—from his ballet performances to his costume to his mealtimes—this research will focus on Versailles: the great stage set from which he projected his *gloire* as a modern Apollo, bearer of light and God-ordained keeper of the people of France.¹²

The mythology Louis XIV built around himself was profound and calculated. He integrated himself into Greco-Roman mythology, inserted himself into a story of power and glory developed centuries before his own birth. He adopted an array of sunbeams as a crown, posed for portraiture wrapped in a wreath of laurels (fig. 1). His

¹¹ Michel Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles* (Paris: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 8-72

¹² Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*, 18.

appropriation of a Greco-Roman deity suggested that he existed outside of time, that he was as absolute and unchanging as his reign would be.¹³ This fantasy is legible in many aspects of the design of the Château and the Gardens of Versailles. The Apollo emblem is stamped on the Grille Royale in front of the palace; Apollo rides his chariot out of a pool in the gardens; he bathes with the nymphs of Tethys' grotto. The sheer scale of the place, in all its marble and gilding, perpetuates the myth that the man, Louis, was something more. This is his power: this heavily manufactured pomp and spectacle inspired aristocrats and peasants alike to submit to his will.¹⁴



Figure 1: Louis XIV in ballet costume as Apollo.

¹³ John Rule, *Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship* (Ohio State University Press, 1969), 45

¹⁴ Rule, *Louis XIV and the Craft of Kingship*, 39-42.

The means by which Louis XIV implemented this mythology at Versailles was direct. In 1664, he launched the first building campaign to expand the palace and gardens despite some paludal environs. He dispatched architect Louis Le Vau (1612–1670) and his assistant Francois d’Orbay to redesign a relatively small hunting lodge, recently rebuilt in the early French Baroque in 1631–33 for his father, Louis XIII (r. 1610–1643). to the design of Philibert le Roi (fig. 2). It was a place of reprieve for the Sun King’s predecessor and held sentimental value for both father and son: so much so that Louis XIV would not have the original structure demolished, instead opting for Le Vau’s *enveloppe* of new rooms in high French Baroque style (known also as French classicism) to embrace Philibert’s renovated core on three sides (fig. 3).¹⁵

¹⁵ Michel Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles* (Paris: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 37-38.

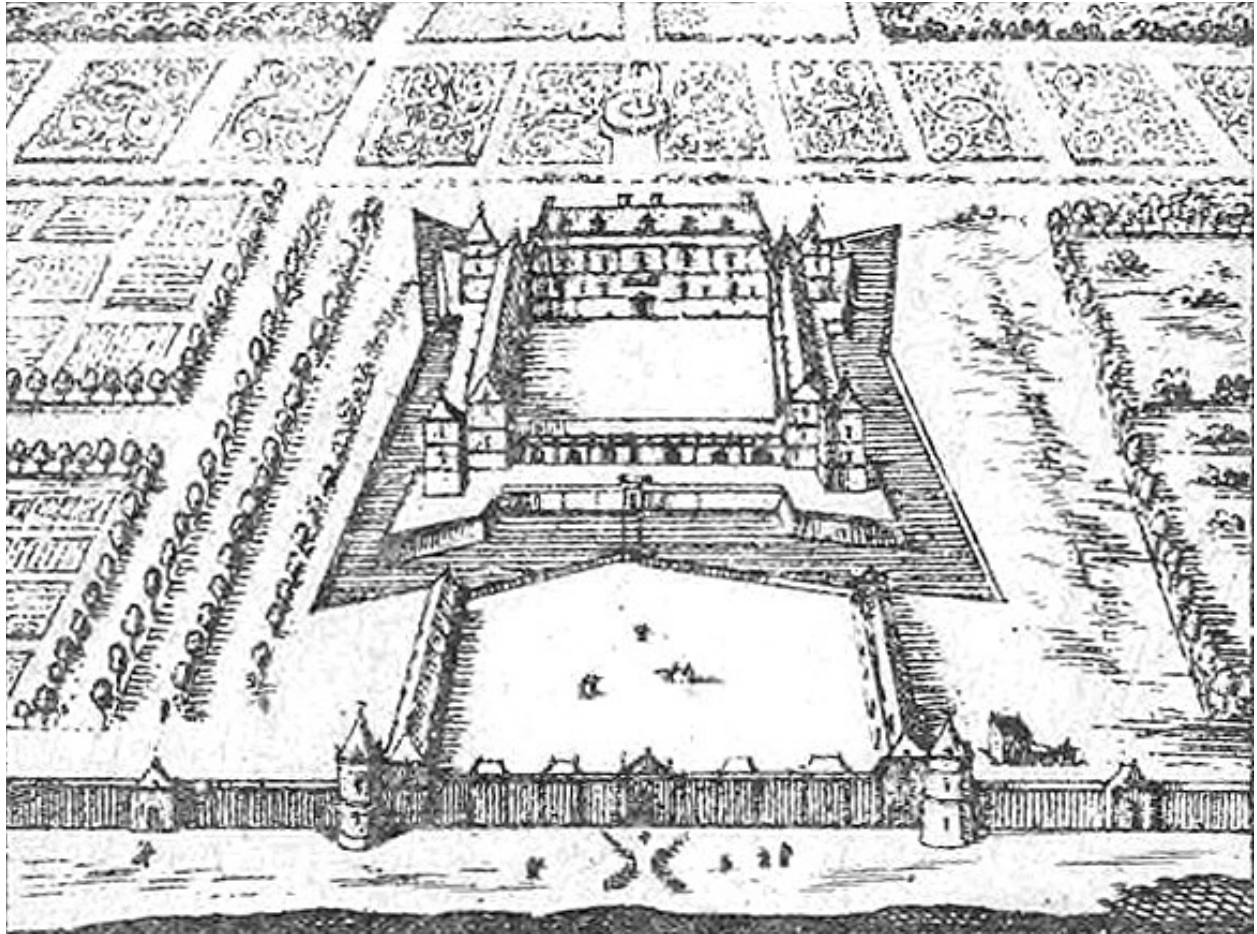


Figure 2: Versailles c. 1630-1640, map by Jacques Gomboust.



Figure 3: Garden facade of Versailles after the addition of Le Vau's envelope, Israel Silvestre, 1674. Note the open terrace where the Hall of Mirrors stands today.

Three more building campaigns followed, each further developing the palace and gardens. The four campaigns significantly expanded the palace to better accommodate a vast number of courtiers and their retinues, culminating with the construction of the Royal Chapel in 1710. Only the first three campaigns placed emphasis on the gardens: the first two were led by André Le Nôtre, a landscape architect whose *bosquets* (translated to “groves”: an open-air room bounded by high hornbeam hedges and dense trees), strong axes, and mythological decoration gave the grounds most of the appearance they retain today. In the third campaign, architect and understudy of Le

Nôtre, Jules Hardouin-Mansart made formal, architectonic additions and modifications to Le Nôtre's spatial framework.¹⁶

Louis XIV worked closely with Le Nôtre in developing the palace grounds. Together, they wove a narrative which glorified the King as the sun itself, radiating warmth and light to those privileged enough to enter the grounds, and doing so in style. Work on the gardens was rapid and efficient; they were completed largely within the span of two decades—a feat considering the relatively rudimentary technology available at the time. The Sun King's vision for the pleasure grounds of his center of power was implemented with direct intent and his directives were executed expeditiously.⁸ Louis XIV's self-glorifying building and landscape projects helped to earn him the absolutism he so craved: the nobility were trapped in a gilded cage, far too distracted by parties, glittery surroundings, and strict court etiquette to build any power for themselves. To anyone, whether of high or low birth, Versailles' immense scale, formal strength, and mythology were testament to the glory of the King.

¹⁶ Ian Thompson, *The Sun King's Garden* (London: Bloomsbury, 2008), 12-14.

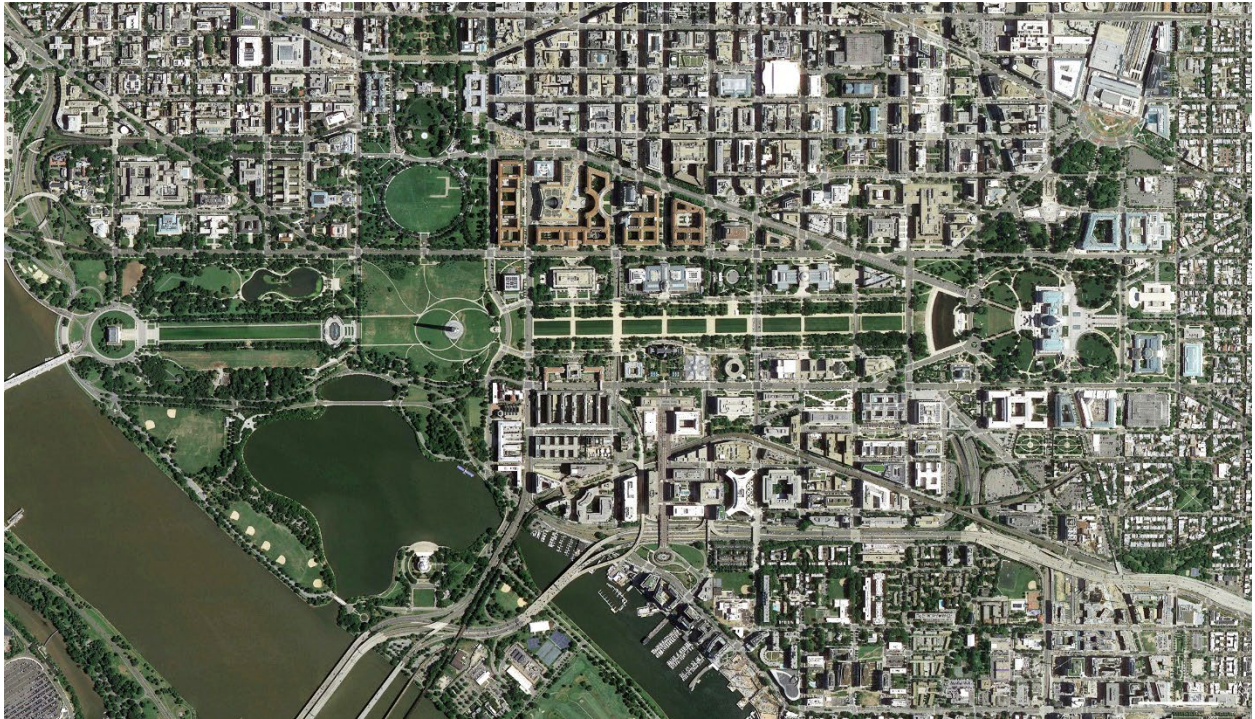


Figure 4: satellite imagery of the National Mall.



Figure 5: satellite imagery of Versailles. Images are at the same scale.

Washington DC

The development of Washington DC as a center of power through design over the course of a century is less systematic than Versailles' conception.¹⁷ The capital of the United States was founded during the fledgling Republic's struggles to find a visual identity. The irony of a nation built on the concept of liberty, freedom, and justice emulating design styles which historians understand as connoting monarchy, consolidated wealth, and absolutist control is evident.¹⁸ The form the capital would take in plan and architecture was hotly debated during the length of its conception—unlike Versailles, the vision of one man, Washington DC is the collective vision of a group intent on designing governmental seat which reflected American ideals.¹⁹

The beginning of a long road to Washington's completion, if indeed it can ever be said to be complete, lies with the United States Congress (founded 1789). After years of power struggle between northern and southern states over the location of a national "district" for a "seat of government," as required by the Constitution (Article 1, section 8), a site somewhere along the Potomac River was finally authorized through the Resident Act of 1790. In 1791, President George Washington (1732-1799) selected the precise location for this new seat of government near the confluence of the Potomac and Anacostia rivers, a boggy site, at least in part, which would be problematic for some

¹⁷ On the planning of Washington DC, see John Reps, *Monumental Washington* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991).

¹⁸ Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*, 10.

¹⁹ Pamela Scott, "'This Vast Empire': The Iconography of the Mall, 1791-1848," in *Studies in the History of Art* [*The Mall in Washington, 1791-1991*] 30 (1991): 45

builders in the future. Washington also selected a planner for the city: French-born military engineer and architect Pierre Charles L'Enfant (1754-1825).²⁰

L'Enfant, son of a painter who lived at Versailles in service of Louis XV (r. 1715-1774) for several years, had followed his father's path by attending the Royal Academy of Painting and Sculpture in Paris before departing France to support the American Revolutionary Army in 1777.²¹ During his military service, L'Enfant met and befriended George Washington, the relationship eventually securing him a position as designer of the new Capital. Within months of his initial tour of the new District, L'Enfant had produced a plan of monumental proportions and grand Baroque geometries (fig.6); his time living in Paris and Versailles had clearly given him strong precedents to draw from. He never had a chance to refine these plans as his insubordination had him removed from any further role in the planning of the city, but his plan survived and its street layouts as well as the locations of the White House (1792-1800, rebuilt following fire in 1817; designed by James Hoban) and Capitol Building (1792-1886 by William Thornton, Charles Bulfinch, Benjamin Latrobe, and Thomas U. Walter) would eventually be brought to fruition.²²

²⁰ John Reys, *Monumental Washington*, 2-5.

²¹ Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues: the Story of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.*, 6.

²² John Reys, *Monumental Washington*, 8-24.

L'Enfant's design called for a street grid overlaid with wide diagonal boulevards, not unlike Le Nôtre's allées in Versailles' garden landscape (fig.5). The monumental core of the city centered on the National Mall, a large series of parks and gardens at the core of Washington studded with memorials, museums and civic buildings. In addition to sites for the White House and the Capitol, L'Enfant's design included a "Grand Avenue," to extend westward from the Capitol, forming the spine of the Mall. He envisioned this promenade lined with allées and framed by gardens of foreign embassies, terminating with a monument to George Washington. Instead, stylistically contrasting buildings, haphazard uses, and conflicting planting schemes pervaded the site for well over a century.

In contrast to Versailles, long delays in executing design elements were not uncommon in Washington DC, and they could obscure the intelligibility of some aspects of L'Enfant's original project and even result in errors. The Washington Monument (1848–1854, 1879–1884), long-unfinished obelisk and visual anchor of the Mall, ended up being built off-axis because the architect encountered marshy and unstable ground reclaimed from the Potomac River (fig. 7). Designed by Robert Mills and intended to perfectly intersect the north-south axis of the White House and the east-west axis of the Capitol, the monument had to be shifted 370 feet east of the White House axis and 123 feet South of the Capitol axis. This axis, vital to L'Enfant's plan, was also marred by the construction of the Pennsylvania Railroad station (1873-1907), which stood near where the National Art Gallery is today (fig. 7). Also conflicting with L'Enfant's design were the winding, informal path systems of Andrew Jackson Downing's English-garden based redesign of the Mall in the 1850s (not specified by Downing but an existing feature

nonetheless), and a botanical garden with a sizeable, highly visible conservatory. The Smithsonian Castle (1849-1855 by James Renwick, Jr.) in its red sandstone and castellated Gothic Revival style clashes with the pale Neoclassicism that most of Washington consists of. But, at the time, it was one of the stylistically diverse architectural “pavilions” that complemented the Downing’s English-garden reconceptualization of the Mall, which also included the Washington Monument, an instance of Egyptian Revival, and the Greek Revival Treasury Building (1836-42 by Robert Mills).²³ However, what was not anticipated was the siting of the Smithsonian Castle in such a way that it encroaches on the central axis of the L’Enfant’s Mall.²⁴

²³ Pamela Scott, “‘This Vast Empire’,” 49.

²⁴ John Reys, *Monumental Washington*, 42-44.

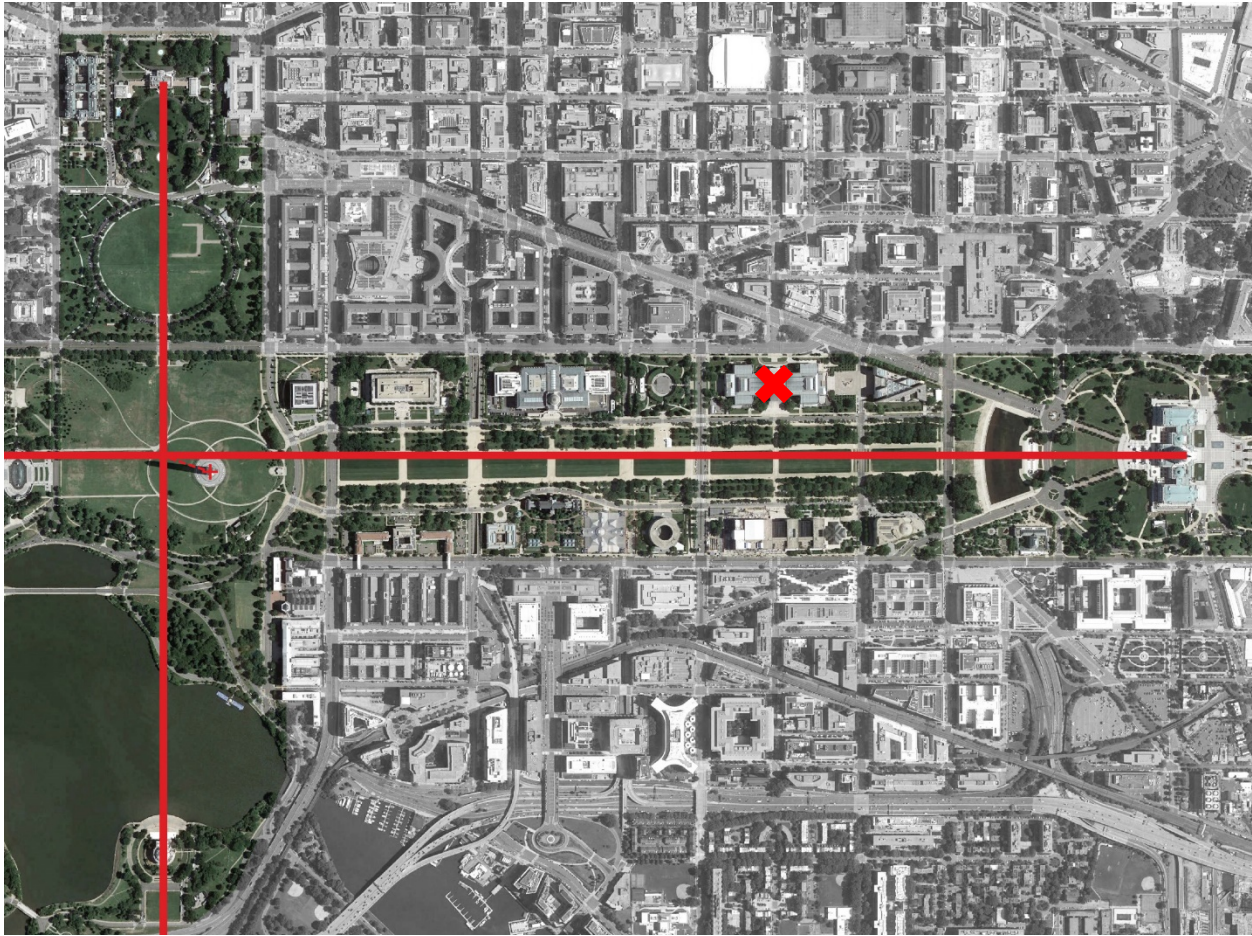


Figure 7: Illustration of L'Enfant's original axis crossing and the current position of the Washington Monument. National Art Gallery marked with an X.

By the turn of the twentieth century, and with the centennial of Washington as the United States Capital approaching, renewed interest in the development of the Mall emerged. These efforts consisted mainly of new hybrids of Washington's somewhat compromised formalism and the informal English Landscape style which had defined much of the previous century. Perhaps best exemplifying these plans are those published in 1900 by Theodore Bingham, a military engineer. Evident in his plan is a revived interest in L'Enfant's Grand Avenue but an overall disinterest in the consistent formality exhibited in the L'Enfant plan (figure 6). Neither the plans of Bingham nor his peers gained any significant traction save a few select elements such as the Arlington

Memorial Bridge, which was finally built in 1932 after appearing in several proposed plans for the Mall. Solutions addressing axial misalignments and encroaching buildings and train stations were conflicting and inconsistent, failing to garner the support of Congress.²⁵

Institutional reforms emerging around this time—a period in which the United States was emerging as a world power—would have greater success in advancing the formal development of the US capital. Sponsored by Senator James McMillan of Michigan, the Senate Parks Commission was formed in 1901 to rectify what was widely as regarded as an ugly center of the nation's capital, unbecoming for an ambitious and imperialistic country. The Commission recruited the biggest names in American landscape and city design—architect and urban designer Daniel Burnham (1846-1912), landscape architect Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. (1870-1957), and architect Charles McKim (1847-1909)—to execute a new plan for the center of Washington. Once again, American designers turned to Europe, as they had a century earlier. This time America went to Europe, rather than Europe coming to America. The three designers and Charles Moore (1855-1942), Secretary of the Commission and aide to Senator McMillan, departed for a seven weeks-long tour of the civic spaces, streetscapes, and great gardens of Europe, noting L'Enfant's Baroque inspiration and taking particular care to study Le Nôtre's work at Versailles, Vaux-le-Vicomte, and Fontainebleau. The group returned to the U.S. with ideas that resonated with the country's Eurocentric aesthetic tastes and a strong sense of their intentions for the future of Washington. They went to work, refining over the following months a plan for Washington's core

²⁵ John Reys, *Monumental Washington* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 70-87.

which would slowly rectify misalignments and other missteps over the following fifty years.²⁶

Washington's inception was meandering and sluggish. Conflicting voices, a lack of clear vision, and limited funding meant its transformation from a swampy, unused flatland into a grand, formal, powerful space was slow and unsure. This is perhaps telling of the type of government in charging of directing development: a republic where many voices must rise together for visions to come to fruition. In stark contrast to this is Louis XIV's Versailles, which took on most of its present form within the span of fifty years. In an absolutist regime, the King's voice is the only one that matters, and his carried commands about his home that would not be denied. With the entirety of France under his control, Louis XIV had the resources, vision, and subordinates necessary to rapidly construct an impressive center of power. Still, despite differences in governing style, context, and means of completion, Washington and Versailles remain remarkably similar landscapes of power in several ways. The following two chapters explore the means by which the protagonists—patrons and designers—deployed scale and icon to advance diametrically opposed political ideologies.

²⁶ John Reys, *Monumental Washington* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 94-98.

CHAPTER 2

SCALE

Scale is perhaps one history's most consistent measures of power. The bigger the castle or palace, the higher the city walls, the taller the highest tower, the more resources, skill, knowledge, and wealth available to make such building possible. The more land a city, nation, or empire covers, the more subjects under its control, the more taxes it can collect, and the more human capital it has to grow ever bigger, both skyward and outward. As anthropologist John H. Bodley puts it, "Scale is about growth and power."²⁷ It makes palpable the concentration of power in a person or a state to those who are subject to it. Louis XIV and André Le Nôtre knew this when they extended Versailles' axis to the far horizon. L'Enfant knew this when he plotted the great avenues extending throughout the District of Columbia without turning or bending for topography. Visitors experience this vastness centuries later when dwarfed by great axes and long open spaces.

Absolute Scale

The Palace of Versailles as completed in 1715 measures 1,400 feet long—the length of nearly five football fields. To walk from one end to the other takes almost fifteen minutes. Even so, the palace, a proud, orderly exemplar of French classicism, is dwarfed by the two thousand acres of landscaped grounds (fig. 5). But the building (and its patron) also triumphs over nature, making their presence known a kilometer away through the three avenues of an immense *patte d'oie* leading to its eastern gates. At the end of long allées of plane trees, each of these avenues terminate in the Place d'Armes, a wide plaza bounded the palatial stables of the king. Through a series of gates and

²⁷ John H. Bodley, *The Power of Scale: A Global History Approach* (Armonk, NY and London: M. E. Sharpe, 2003), 5.

courtyards, spaces become laterally smaller and the palace looms ever-larger ahead: through the first gate, known as the Grille d'Honneur, lies a court of the same name, bounded by the twin Ministers' Wings, the great forepaws of the palace added in 1679. Narrowing again at the brilliantly gilded *Grille Royale*, the second gate, the space feels more tall than wide. Whereas contemporary French hôtels and châteaux had solid masonry "street screens" along the front of their courtyards (cours d'honneur), Versailles' gilded iron *grille* allows those approaching to take in the full impact of the palace. Collecting all the momentum building to this point, the oldest part of the palace embraces a marble courtyard with tall early Baroque façades on three sides. Straight ahead, the light from the garden on the west side of the palace is visible shining into the vestibule. For all its grandeur, the palace almost seems a stage set for the gardens beyond. Just above, behind an intricate gold and iron balcony, lies the King's bedroom, directly on axis and clearly the center of this vast domain.²⁸

From Louis XIV's dominant perch above the entrance courts, he would see the world radiating out from his bedroom, a green horizon of hills in the distance. Until 1684, the monarch could step to the west from his bedroom onto a marble-paved terrace—essentially an elevated courtyard—to view the gardens (fig 8). The cold, damp French climate made this feature unpleasant for much of the year, and it was replaced by the Hall of Mirrors in 1678–84 (fig. 9). This glittering space, designed by Jules Hardouin-Mansart with an art program by Charles Le Brun, is a golden gallery on the western façade of the palace. Looking west from this vast hall of glass, the gardens unfold. First comes the *Parterre d'Eau*, a large terrace occupied mostly by two sheets of water $\frac{3}{4}$

²⁸ On the novel relationship between architecture and landscape at Versailles, see Spiro Kostof, *A History of Architecture: Settings and Rituals*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 537.

acre in size. Past the Water Parterre, *Bosquets*, or groves, stand like miniature forests bounded by perfectly sheered, 20-foot-tall walls of hornbeam. They frame the *Tapis Vert*, a “green carpet” of flawless turf that feels more luxurious when considering the absence of lawn mowers at its inception—at the time of Louis XIV, maintenance would have been costly and time-consuming. At the terminus of this 330-meter-long lawn come two more water features: the Fountain of Apollo and finally the Grand Canal. From a basin of still water, the Fountain of Apollo throws forth three geyser-like towers of water as high as the surrounding trees (fig. 10). Whereas the Apollo fountain aimed for height, the Grand Canal is a mile-long, 63-acre artificial canal with a 3500-foot long cross-axis, which commands the perspective of the gardens, draws the eye far out to the horizon, and reflects the sky. This vast mirror once held a fleet of boats for the enjoyment of the King, from Venetian gondolas to large-scale models of battleships, which were used for theatrical naval battles. This artificial lake reaches out to the horizon, suggesting the infinite potential of Louis XIV’s reign (fig 11).



Figure 8: the garden facade of the Château c. 1679, artist unknown. The Hall of Mirrors now lies where the recessed portion of the façade is depicted here.



Figure 9: the Hall of Mirrors at dusk. The windows on the right look out over the Grand Perspective of the gardens.

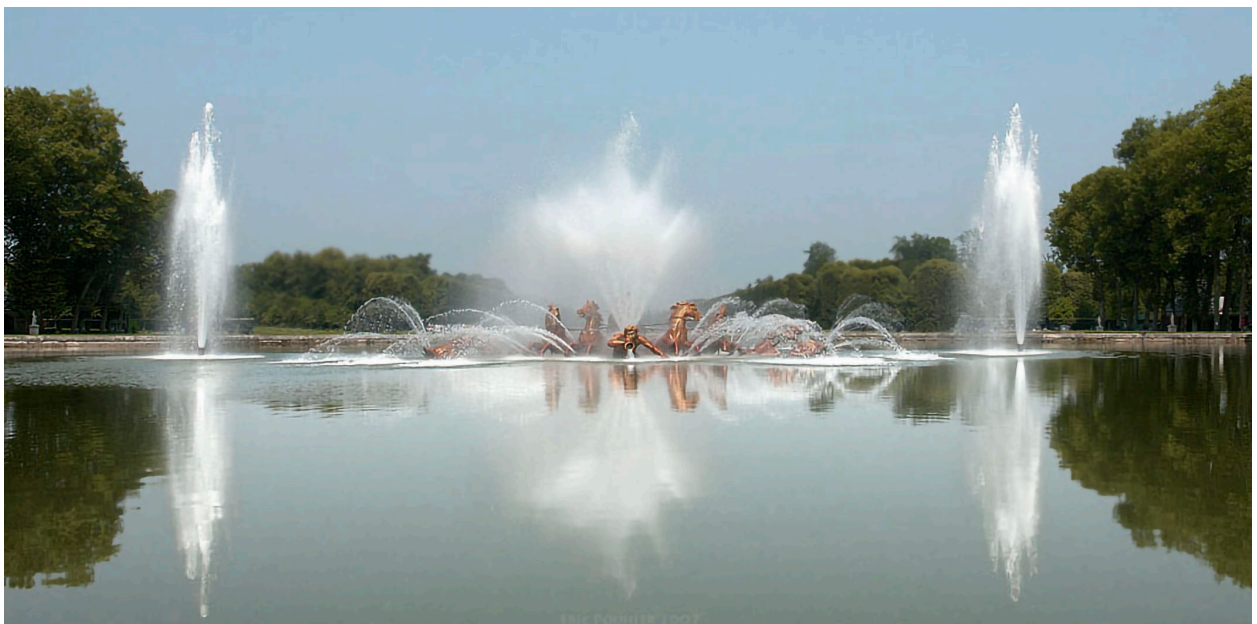


Figure 10: the Bassin d'Apollon with fountains in play by Eric Fournier, 2007.



Figure 11: the Grand Canal, 2007 by Remi Jouan.

There is a distinctive rhythm to the Gardens of Versailles, a perfection of form even over such immense tracts. Imperceptible is any wobble of line or warp of perspective; all allées and lines of sight intersect exactly as was intended. The composition is colossal: a panorama of control, geometry, and vastness that is difficult to fathom and even harder to capture through representation. Such man-made hugeness speaks to the unfathomable resources and power of the King. The fact that the place is Louis XIV's pleasure park is impactful: if a monarch can do all of this purely for his own enjoyment, what can he not do?

Versailles on the Potomac

If Versailles and Washington DC have planning principles in common, then the Capitol is analogous to the château de Versailles, the Mall, along with the city's major avenues,

to Versailles' garden. Like Louis's palace, the Capitol lies across a strong east-to-west axis, which is established by East Capitol Street and the grassy Mall to the west, for which L'Enfant had planned a "Grand Avenue" (fig. 6). East Capitol Street is a relatively modest, tree-lined residential street. While the Capitol provides an impressive terminus, the street is just one quarter the width of the grand, hundred-meter-wide boulevards of the *patte d'oie* at Versailles. Northeast Maryland Avenue and Southeast Pennsylvania Avenue nearly form a trident in Washington similar to that at the front of Versailles, but the Thomas Jefferson Building of the Library of Congress (1890-1897 by John L. Smithmeyer, Paul J. Pelz, and Edward Pearce Casey)²⁹ and the Supreme Court Building (1932-1935 by Cass Gilbert and Cass Gilbert, Jr.) obstruct the *patte d'oie* effect. The Library of Congress and the Supreme Court were originally both housed in the Capitol Building, but their growth as institutions eventually required premises of their own.³⁰ Being rectangular structures on rectangular blocks, they do not bend to embrace the approaching avenues like the Royal Stables at Versailles (fig 12). Arriving from the east between the Library of Congress and Supreme Court, East Capitol Street opens to the Capitol Grounds. A sweeping, informal planting scheme designed by Frederick Law Olmsted (1822-1903) in 1875 frames a vast central plaza.³¹ The space is open and airy, and the steps of the Capitol cascade down from its gleaming white facade, welcoming visitors. Today, closer inspection reveals a rope barrier and accompanying police

²⁹ "Thomas Jefferson Building," Thomas Jefferson Building | Architect of the Capitol, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/library-of-congress/thomas-jefferson-building>.

³⁰ "Supreme Court Building," Supreme Court Building | Architect of the Capitol, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/supreme-court/supreme-court-building>.

³¹ On Olmsted's design of the Capitol Grounds, see David C. Streatfield, "The Olmsteds and the Landscape of the Mall." *Studies in the History of Art* 30 (1991): 116-41.

officers restricting access to the central portico; the space suggests access to all, but security measures perhaps dating from the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks by Al-Qaeda, force visitors to take a less stately approach, entering through a visitor center beneath the plaza. There are, however, no gilded gates marking the threshold to the Capitol, which indicates a more democratic approach to scale as expressed in elevation as befits a temple to the Republic rather than a king.

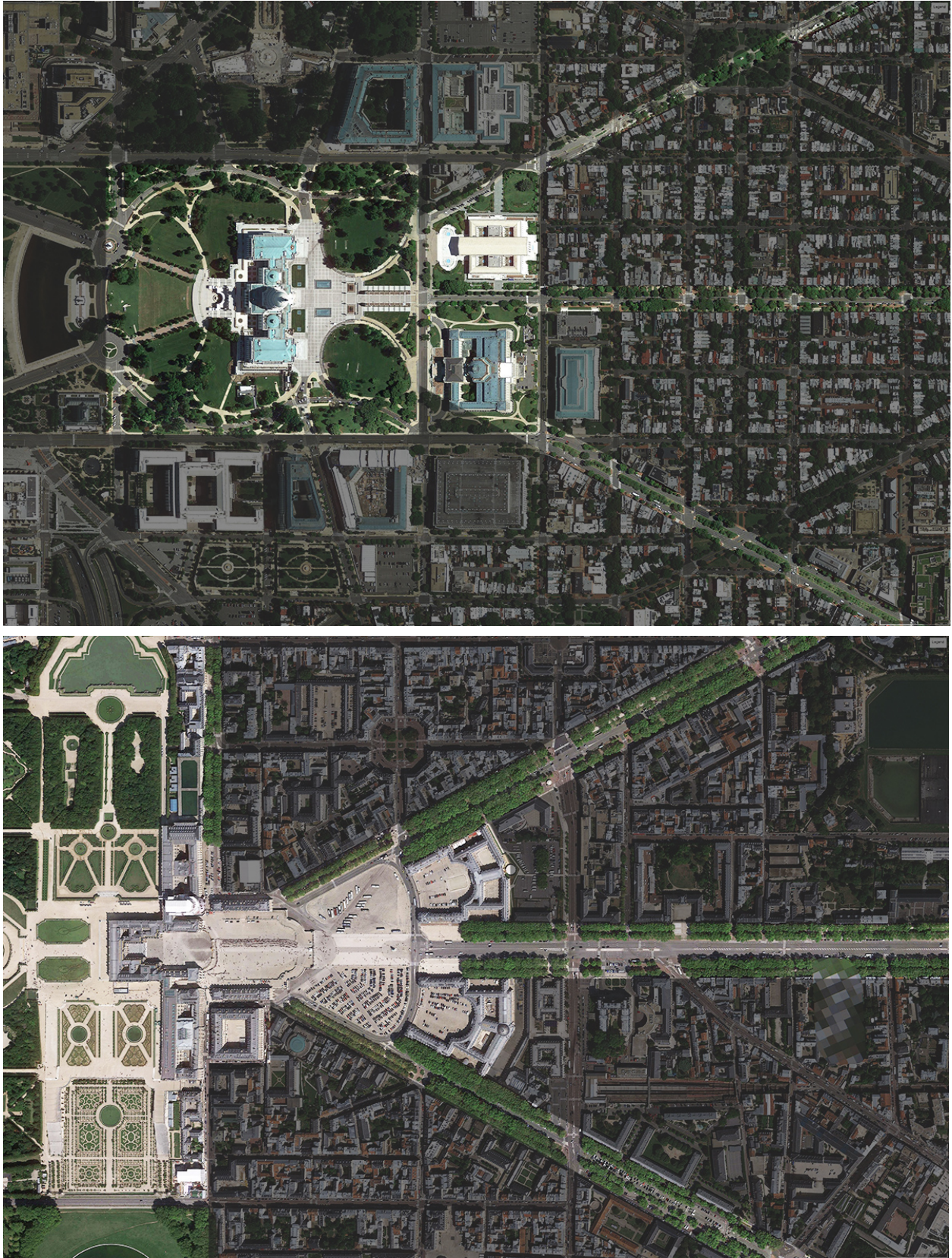


Figure 12: Partial pattes d'oie on Capitol Hill (top) and complete ones at Versailles (bottom).

To the west, the National Mall is today a space of museums, memorials, and monuments. In scale, it is not radically different from L'Enfant's vision for a promenade flanked by embassies, but it is a much more civic space compared to Versailles. While pleasant in many respects, it is no pleasure ground. Starting from the western steps of the Capitol, a grand perspective not unlike the Sun King's unfolds. While L'Enfant's plan for this area in front of the Capitol is not delineated, the early twentieth century brought some definition to it. Across the wide lawn stands the Ulysses S. Grant Memorial (1902-1924) by Henry Shradly, which features a 16-foot-tall equestrian statue of Ulysses S. Grant facing west from atop a 28-foot-tall high pedestal.³² The statue now overlooks the six-acre, fan shaped Capitol Reflecting Pool created in 1971.³³ This large reflecting pool, which might be compared to the sheets of the Parterre d'Eau, fans out toward a vast, linear strip of turf bordered by trees. This, the main axis of the Mall, is a mile-long, 180-foot-wide spine of turf bounded by wide walks and double-allées of elms. Behind the elms lie the museums, galleries, and government offices which, over the years, have established a permeable border along the sides of the Mall. The facades of most of these buildings are obscured by the elms, but an exception here is the castle of the Smithsonian Institute, which not only protrudes into the Mall, but its main tower also soars 145 feet above the Mall.

Across this great stretch of grass, the Washington Monument punctures the sky like a sword, 555 feet of marble dwarfing every structure in sight. This position about 1.3

³² "Ulysses S. Grant Memorial," Ulysses S. Grant Memorial | Architect of the Capitol, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/ulysses-s-grant-memorial>.

³³ "Capitol Reflecting Pool," Capitol Reflecting Pool | Architect of the Capitol, accessed September 29, 2020, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/buildings-grounds/capitol-building/capitol-grounds/reflecting-pool>.

miles from the Capitol steps was the terminus of L'Enfant's plan, but it did not call for such a dominant vertical end because L'Enfant had planned for an equestrian statue of George Washington instead of an obelisk.³⁴ In a 1791 letter to George Washington, he described a "prospect from the [president's] palace at a point which being seen from both I have designated as the proper for to erect a grand equestrian figure."³⁵ In L'Enfant's plan, an axis to the north came to rest on the garden façade of the White House. The presence of a monolith as tall as the obelisk is draws far more attention and has considerable visual presence in comparison to an equestrian statue. In the twentieth century, other vantage points were created so that from just west of the great obelisk, people had sweeping prospects to three other structures of white: the White House to the north, the Lincoln Memorial (1914-1922 by Henry Bacon) to the west, and the Jefferson Memorial (1939-1943 by John Russell Pope; Eggers and Higgins) to the south. Despite each being at least a half a mile from this vantage point, the monumentally scaled structures are stark against the greenery of the Mall and carry a distinct presence. Particularly compelling is the view back to this spot from the Lincoln Memorial. From the steps of this heavy Doric temple, another reflecting pool, 2,000-foot-long and 170-foot-wide, mirrors the Washington Monument magnificently. This, the Lincoln Memorial Reflecting Pool (1922-1923), was part of the Senate Park Commission's plan. Built on land reclaimed from the Potomac River and only half the size of the Grand Canal at Versailles, it clearly draws from the Sun King's own reflecting pool. In fact, in the original plan by the Senate Park Commission, the Lincoln Memorial

³⁴ Scott, "'This Vast Empire'," 42.

³⁵ "Pierre-Charles L'Enfant," Pierre-Charles L'Enfant - History of Early American Landscape Design, 2020, https://heald.nga.gov/mediawiki/index.php/Pierre-Charles_L%E2%80%99Enfant.

Reflecting Pool was to include a cross-axis like the Grand Canal, though constraints of the mall would have shrunk it to half the size of its French predecessor (fig 13).³⁶

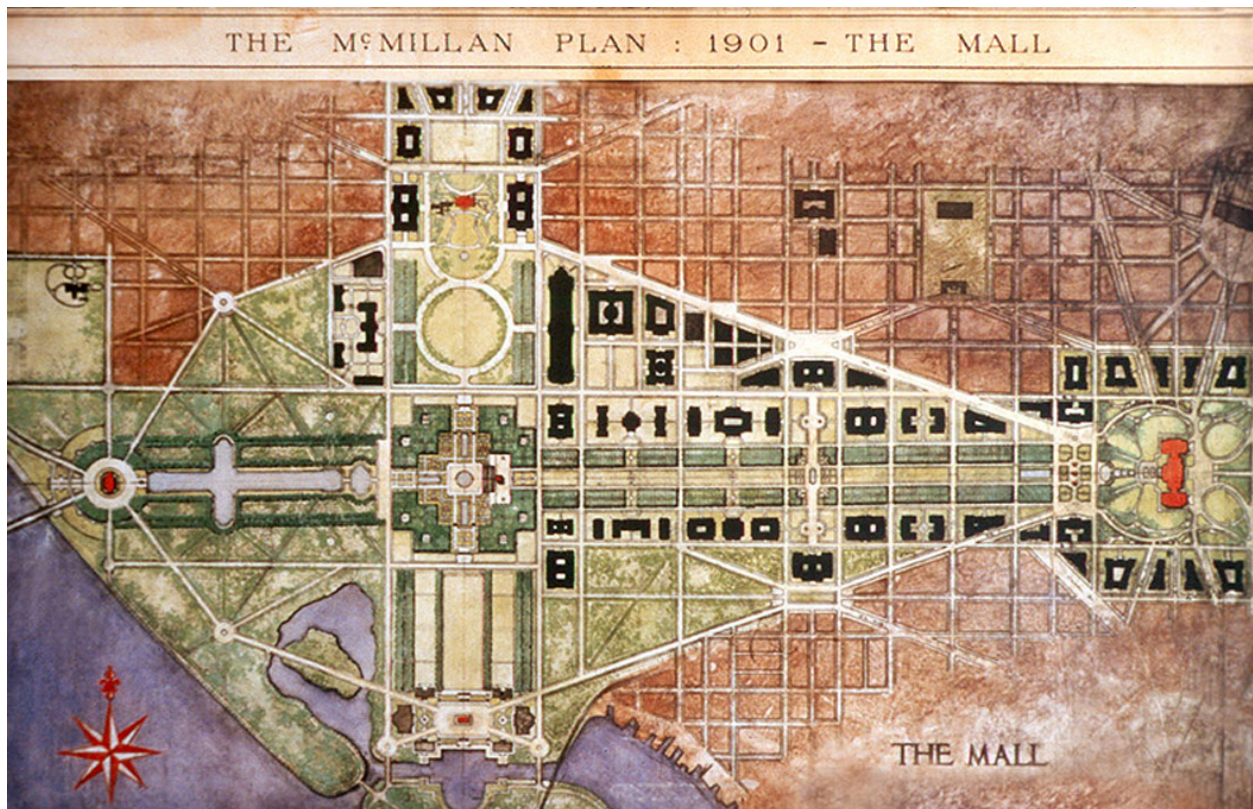


Figure 13: The McMillan Plan of 1901. The cross-shaped reflecting pool is visible at the left.

Massive geometries do not stop at the National Mall: this area is a small piece of L'Enfant's ambitious street plan for the capital city (fig. 6). His wide, radiating avenues formally recall the Baroque lines of Versailles and are superimposed on a more logical grid of streets not unlike the grid of the Bosquets (fig. 5). Important points and buildings are physically and visually connected by boulevards comparable to the grand allées of Versailles which tie the palace, fountains, and city into a cohesive composition. But on Pennsylvania Avenue, one sees the White House and the Capitol, not the Grand

³⁶ Reps, *Monumental Washington*, 112.

Trianon and Dragon Fountain. The connection between monuments and seats of government mutually emphasizes their importance and their power; the spatial and visual relationship between the Capitol and the White House—as well as the Mall and its monuments—indicates a measure of control and consideration that comes from a powerful, united government

L'Enfant was certainly not the first to conceive of a city implementing such complex Baroque geometries. While the radiating avenues were first seen in European city planning in Sixtus V's plan for Rome (1585–90), urban theory that yoked garden design to urbanism appears in France in the mid-eighteenth century. Priest and architectural theorist Marc-Antoine Laugier (1713-1769) railed against Paris' then dark, narrow, confusing and twisting medieval streets in his *Essay on Architecture* (1753). He asserted that a city should be “as a forest,” going so far as to mention Le Nôtre (then 50 years dead) by name, insisting his “taste and intelligence” were necessary for urban improvements that would make a vast city like Paris beautiful, interesting, and logical.³⁷ L'Enfant, who grew up at Versailles (as noted above), seems to have felt the same way: his grand vision of vast lines between plazas and palaces directly recall the hunting grounds, pleasure parks, and grand avenues of Le Nôtre's France.³⁸ Overlaid on a logical grid, Washington's long avenues clearly function as monumental connections throughout the capital, but they also generate interesting, even odd “leftover” spaces: tiny triangular plots, trapezoids and irregular polygons. Chinatown Park and Milian Park along Massachusetts Avenue are excellent examples: tiny, triangular patches of plant

³⁷ Marc-Antoine Laugier, *Essai sur L'Architectutre* (Los Angeles: Henessey and Ingalls, 1977), 127-128.

³⁸ Scott W. Berg, *Grand Avenues: the Story of Pierre Charles L'Enfant, the French Visionary Who Designed Washington, D.C.*, 26-29.

life adjacent to wedge-shaped buildings jutting out into the sky (fig.14). This range of scale and form, from the strange little happenstance plots to the massive connecting avenues, contributes to a feeling of immensity, complexity, and power that early American leaders seem to have felt would befit a great power.



Figure 14: Chinatown and Milian parks—leftover spaces as a result of L'Enfant's streets.

Audiences

While Versailles and Washington are undeniably impressive to the present-day viewer, they would have carried a few rather unpleasant connotations for their earlier audiences. For French Nobility under Louis XIV, Versailles meant strict etiquette and little agency. The Sun King moved his court to Versailles in 1682. This was a strategic move: with the nobility under his nose and under the roof he built, he would more exert control over them than ever. While only nobility of significance were housed in the main palace building and on the same floor as the king, they would have spent a significant amount of time in his apartments, taking part in intricately choreographed ceremonies of

his waking, dining, and sleeping. The views of Versailles' forecourts and gardens from the courtiers' apartments and the King's would have been in stark contrast to their stylish Parisian residences: the city had pleasant gardens but none of them commanded the horizon. The royal Tuileries palace and various aristocratic hôtels were self-contained enclosures carved into the dense urban fabric; they were swallowed up by the city, not dominating the countryside like a jewel box on a hill as at Versailles (fig. 15).³⁹ This contrast furthered the narrative that the Sun King reigned over vast tracts of space which he would transform into intricate, richly ornamented gardens to be enjoyed both on the ground and from an equally magnificent palace. The nobility, whether attending the King's walks through the vast gardens or accompanying him to a comedy, were constantly reminded of his power to turn a humble hunting lodge into a glorious inversion of the court's urban capital in which outdoor rooms and architectural settings, such as smaller palaces (e.g., Ange-Jacques Gabriel's Petit Trianon of 1762–1768), were engulfed by a massive green garden, as if they were “cities” within territory of France.

³⁹ On court life at Versailles, see Louis de Rouvroy Saint-Simon, Bayle St. John, and W. H. Lewis, *Memoirs of the Duc De Saint-Simon* (London: Batsford, 1964).



Figure 15: the northern wing of the chateau from the Parterre du Nord. Author photograph.

Citizens of Washington would not have had such a personal relationship with the monumental architecture of the city purely because they did not reside in the Capitol itself. They could, however, visit the building, stand in the Rotunda, or gaze out from porticoes. While the White House is as close to a royal residence as one might come in the United States, it does not house thousands of courtiers and is clearly and purposefully not the centerpiece of L'Enfant's composition, as its domed, hill-crowning neighbor appears to be. Still, the National Mall and its accompanying architecture were conceived as (mostly) public spaces and are still widely used by residents of the capital. Urban design scholar Norma Evenson grew up in the Capitol Hill neighborhood and describes the Capitol itself as "...my guardian and friend.... It was like a stone

landscape crowned with an iron dome that I scaled many times. I went to the Capitol for solitude and escape, as a place to dream.”⁴⁰ Evenson’s description indicates a different power of scale compared to Louis XIV’s intimidation of the French nobility; in Washington, immense, grand spaces have always belonged, theoretically, to everyday people. Today, many Washingtonians commute along L’Enfant’s radiating avenues and have Sunday picnics on Olmsted Jr.’s great lawn, taking ownership of the city as nobility at Versailles likely never did. Or, if citizens experience disenfranchisement, they might demand ownership of city, as seen during the Black Lives Matter movement in 2020, when they inscribed their rights literally on the street in a yellow mural that reads “Black Lives Matter” (fig. 16).

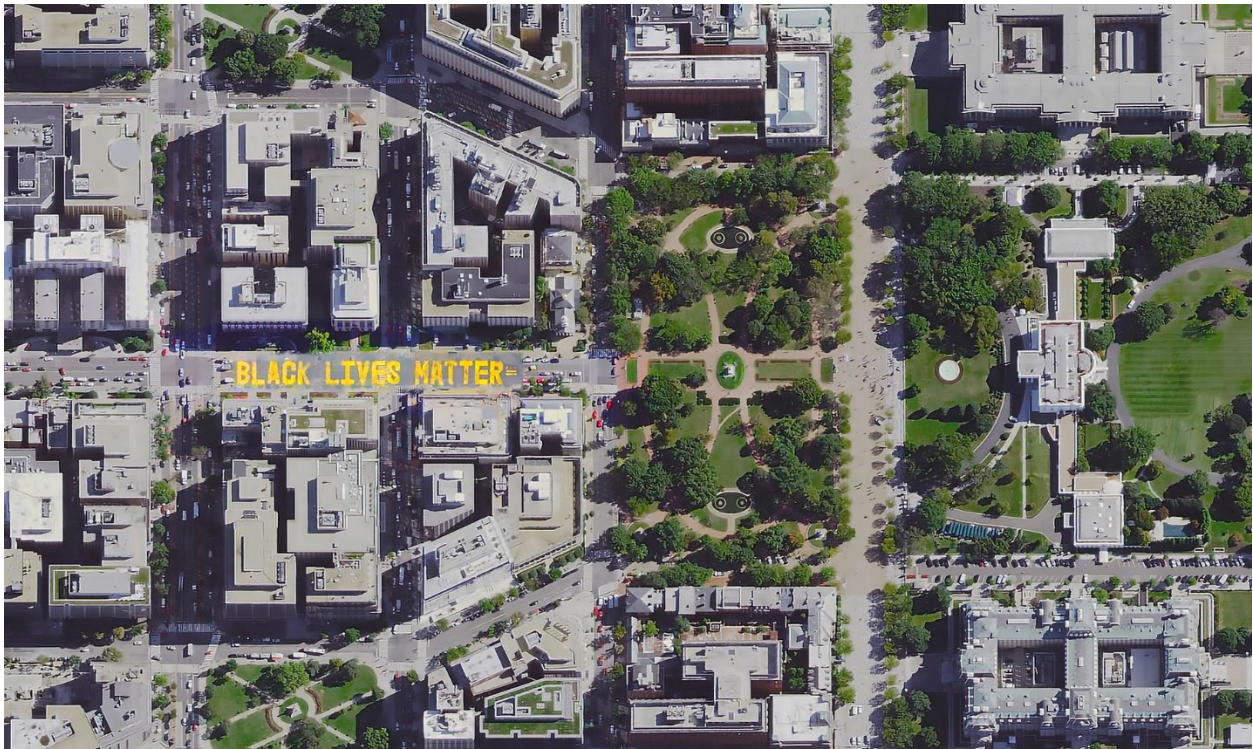


Figure 16: “Black Lives Matter” painted on 16th street north of Lafayette Square. The White House is visible at the far right.

⁴⁰ Evenson, “Monumental Spaces,” 31.

Unfortunately, intimidation through scale might still be operating in Washington. For enslaved Africans and African Americans in the Potomac region from the late 18th to early 19th centuries, the gleaming white core of Washington was a cruel reminder of the United States' repeated failures to deliver liberty and justice for all, not a beautiful collection of monuments consecrated to the spirit of freedom. Scholars generally agree that in the construction of Washington slaves were used extensively for harvesting, processing, and transporting building materials if not for skilled labor.⁴¹ This inhumanity did not die with victims of chattel slavery. For African Americans whose ancestors were forced to carve, cut, and transport limestone and marble, fell timber, and lay brick for the Capitol, Washington Monument, and White House, these places contain narratives of greater complexity than they do for many white Americans. It suffices to recall that, in a speech delivered by Michelle Obama at the 2016 Democratic National Convention, she said, "I wake up every morning in a house that was built by slaves," revealing that the shadow of this dark period still looms, even if progress toward racial equality has been made. Memories like these are enshrined in places of power.

⁴¹ On the use of slave labor in the construction of the Capitol and White House, see William C. Allen, "History of Slave Laborers in the Construction of the United States Capitol," 2005.

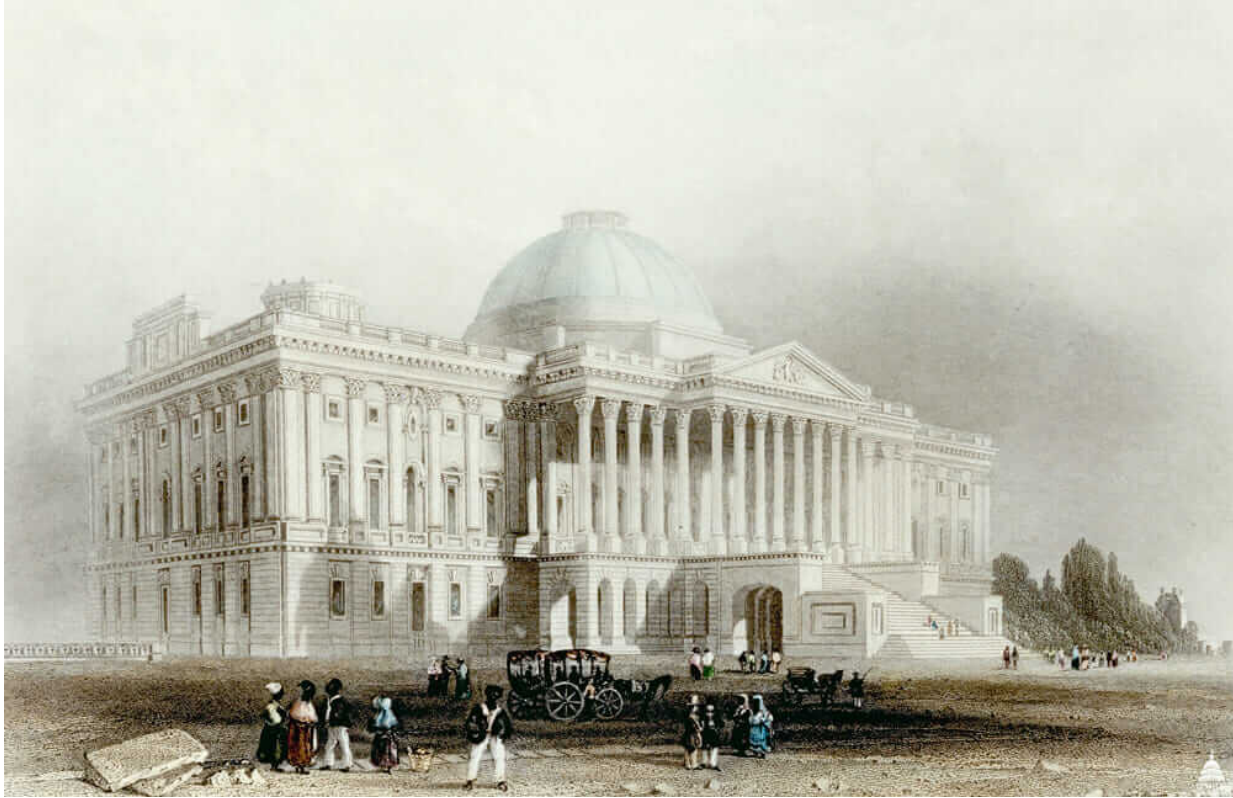


Figure 17: The United States Capitol in 1840 with African Americans in the foreground. By William H. Bartlett.

A Question of Measure

The magnitude of Versailles and Washington is comparable not just in experience but in measurement: at the National Mall, the distance from the Capitol to the Lincoln Memorial is 2.23 miles; at Versailles, the distance from the forecourt of the palace to the edge of the park is just 0.2 miles shorter. At an average pace, it would take nearly an hour to walk both distances without breaks to enjoy a fountain, *bosquet*, or memorial. This is quite a stroll, and the physical exertion contributes to a feeling of smallness experienced temporally and spatially when on foot. The defining structures of both places, the Capitol and the château, have immense facades that loom over their respective grounds, the Mall and the gardens. At 1,400 feet in length and 60 feet in

height, the garden façade of the Château de Versailles seems as though it might extend for miles. The original United States Capitol was originally far less imposing: just 140 feet tall at the crown of a copper dome and 350 feet in length; even so, it dominated the city from the top of Capitol Hill (fig. 18).



Figure 18: View of Capitol, 1839, by William H. Bartlett, painting made for N. P. Willis, American Scenery; or, Land, Lake, and River/Illustrations of Transatlantic Nature by N. P. Willis (London: George Virtue, 1840)

As the country expanded its territory to its own infinite potential under the doctrine of Manifest Destiny (1845) to the Pacific Ocean and admitted more states to the Union, the Capitol was greatly expanded through additions designed by Thomas U. Walter: new and larger Senate and House wings, completed in 1850, brought the length of the Capitol to 700 feet, just half that of Versailles. However, the Capitol's position on the crown of a hill—made more emphatic by Walter's commanding new 289-foot-tall

dome—soars high above the Mall, allowing the Capitol to dominate the surrounding landscape.⁴² Versailles has no such dome, and its façade of only 60 vertical feet is easily lost behind trees and retaining walls, but it remains an imposing and tranquil watcher of the gardens when in view, and is visible from much of the terraces and walks.

Topography plays an important role in issues of scale. The topography at Versailles contributes to the visibility of the palace within the gardens: at 460 feet above sea level, the hill upon which the palace rests is 93 feet above the Grand Canal. The gardens slope evenly down from the château, giving the structure a considerable presence when viewed from the canal. Most of the National Mall is just 10-15 feet above sea level, but Capitol Hill rises 70 feet above the great lawn, commanding the plain. The Washington and Lincoln Memorials are slightly elevated as well at 30 feet, contributing to a sense of dignity and sacred importance of these structures. In both Washington and Versailles, designers took advantage of existing topography to elevate literally and metaphorically key structures above surrounding land, increasing their perceived size, establishing them as focal points, and making their messages of power more legible.

Construction

One marked difference between the use of scale as power in Versailles and Washington is found in the engineering ingenuity of the former. The French formal style of gardening, brought to prominence and fully developed by André Le Nôtre, was an innovation. It was a direct descendant of Italian gardens, though it traded playfulness

⁴² Mario E. Campioli, "Thomas U. Walter, Edward Clark and the United States Capitol." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 23, no. 4 (1964): 210-13.

and constricting Italian hillside sites for the wide plains of northern France and an austerity that was typically *à la française*. Wide, flat tracts of land like those at Versailles could open to the horizon, uniting large acreages with careful compositions. The earthworks, geometric calculations, and vision required to compose a French formal garden is astounding even on a forgiving site, and the land Le Nôtre tamed at Versailles was not by any means forgiving.⁴³

The gardens of Versailles were once a marshy, swampy, mosquito-riddled lowland. Its soils were of poorly drained clay: bad for almost any gardening, let alone transplanting mature trees, which Louis XIV insisted on as he wanted to see rapid change. Le Nôtre's challenge was to tame all of this wilderness, give it form and purpose, and drain the poor soils. He did so through ingenuity and careful forethought, employing all the technologies of the day to bring such a vast tract of land to heel. Exorbitant amounts of manpower were required for this often dangerous work, and thousands of soldiers from the French military were used to move earth in times of peace.⁴⁴ Versailles was an innovative, ambitious, resource-sinking project, a testament to the power of the King and his absolutist regime.

If the scale of a government's resources deployed at Versailles can be considered a direct translation of its power, Louis XIV seemed to be communicating to the world that his resources were limitless. This was, of course, not the case, and by the end of his reign he had squandered innumerable *livres* on wars of vanity and his beloved gardens. Perhaps the most disastrous of these money-burning campaigns was one to bring the River Eure to Versailles from 40 miles away.

⁴³ Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 76.

⁴⁴ Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 59-60.

Water was always a problem at Versailles. The plains of the *Île-de-France* made the gravity-powered fountains of the pre-industrial world difficult in the first place, let alone atop a relatively high point like Versailles. The topography, combined with a lack of available water in and around the park (ironic considering the boggy conditions tackled by Le Nôtre), made powering Louis and Le Nôtre's ambitious system of 2,456 jets of water nearly impossible to power all at once. The King was greatly displeased that his fountains would not all play at once; instead, fountain boys would run between *bosquets* as the king approached, using a series of whistles to ensure that the appropriate jets and cascades were in play as he approached.⁴⁵ To run all the fountains simultaneously was itself a scalar expression of power the country's other nobles could not have matched.

The solution to this embarrassment—after the monstrous and very expensive Marly Machine (fig. 19) failed to pump enough water to Versailles from the Seine—was to redirect the Eure over a vast series of canals and aqueducts to supply Versailles with more than enough water to run all the fountains at once. The beginning of the canal system would be nearly 80 kilometers away, and the route would cross the Eure's own river valley. This required an extraordinarily sized aqueduct: in the Roman style, with its highest level of arches standing at 70 meters—higher than the towers of Nôtre Dame in Paris. Engineers suggested a siphon system to hug the valley floor instead, but Louis XIV would have none of it; he wanted a triumphal, enormous aqueduct: a testament to the power he had to redirect entire rivers over their own valley floors, and to do so beautifully.

⁴⁵ Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 230.

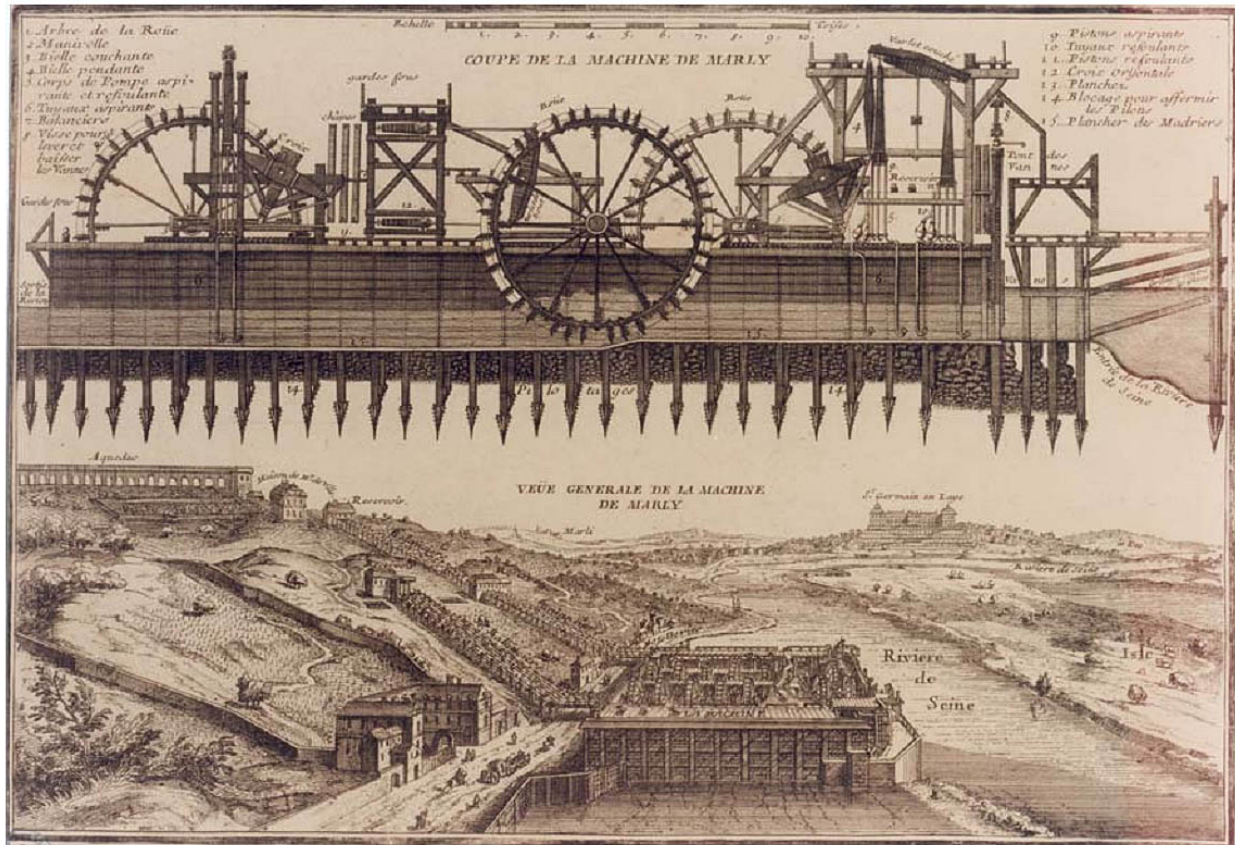


Figure 19: Elevation and perspective of the Marly Machine by Nicolas de Fer c. 1715.

Necessary to complete such a project were massive works of earth, masonry, engineering, and most importantly: labor. Conscripted into the Eure project were anywhere from ten to forty-thousand troops at any given time depending on the impatience of the King and the state of French military affairs. Malaria was rampant in such marshy conditions, and it is estimated that as many as ten thousand lives were lost from what was likely malaria and less commonly construction accidents over the course of the construction of the canals and aqueducts. For those who survived, conditions were not ideal: digging for the canals and assembling masonry for aqueducts was grueling work, and nearly all of it was done by hand.⁴⁶ Not only did Louis XIV have

⁴⁶ Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 253-258

the vision and the resources to take on such a project: he had an inordinate number of laborers at his disposal to execute his plan, which indicates the seemingly endless potential of his reign.

This was the power of the Sun King: to reroute a river just to power his fountains, at the cost of thousands of lives and millions of *livres*, all at a time when potable water was a limited resource for much of France. The Eure project, never finished due to the outbreak of the Nine Years' War, was the most blatantly disastrous but not the whole of Louis XIV's money-wasting habits for the good of his gardens. He spent millions on flowers, trees, lead pipes, bronze sculpture, marble trim, mid-construction design changes and frivolous destruction and reconstruction of garden elements when the vast majority of France was quite poor. The scale of his kingdom and all its resources enabled him to spend so impractically; taxes from 19 million subjects funded this spending despite what little they had as individuals, as only the Third Estate was subject to taxation.⁴⁷ This spending and indifference did not matter in Louis' lifetime; he was the center of the world, and the world would bend to his will, even if it strained and snapped in the process.

Washington is less egregious in terms of waste: frugality was not a choice but a necessity for a fledgling nation and paying even for the land on which the city was constructed required deals between individual states and the federal government. In Washington, there were no gilded statuary, no importation of mature trees, and no rapid-fire building and razing of pleasure pavilions and fountains as Louis XIV was known to order due to his shifting tastes. Construction timelines were also quite different

⁴⁷ On taxation practices in the Kingdom of France, see Gerri Chanel, "Taxation as a Cause of the French Revolution: Setting the Record Straight," *Studia Historica Gedanensia* 6 (2016).

here: changes to the Capital were relatively slow in coming to fruition, long after essential structures such as the Capitol and White House were completed. Nearly 150 years passed between the approval of L'Enfant's plan and the construction of the Jefferson Memorial, the last of the four major termini of the mall to be built. This reality demonstrates that although Versailles and Washington might display power through scale in similar ways, the disparate governments they represent have a marked impact on their inception and construction.

Still, by 1900 Washington was no quaint hamlet. As a city, it exercised engineering and construction power to achieve massive and impressive scale: a considerable part of the mall was wrought right out of the Potomac River. Dredging operations between 1882 and 1890 were ordered by Congress to improve navigability in the Potomac after a series of floods deposited sediment and created mud flats. A new, deeper channel alleviated flooding and improved navigability; the removed silt was used to create 628 acres of reclaimed land (fig. 20). This land would be the foundation for West and East Potomac Park as well as the hillock that the Lincoln Memorial perches upon. This was the extent of significant earthworks in Washington besides simple regrading for roads and smoothing the land that would become the National Mall.⁴⁸ This work—completed two centuries after the major earthworks at Versailles—was aided by technology unknown to the soldiers of the Sun King who carried dirt in baskets on their backs.

⁴⁸ William Tindall, *Standard History of the City of Washington* (Knoxville: H.W. Crew & Co., 1914), 479.

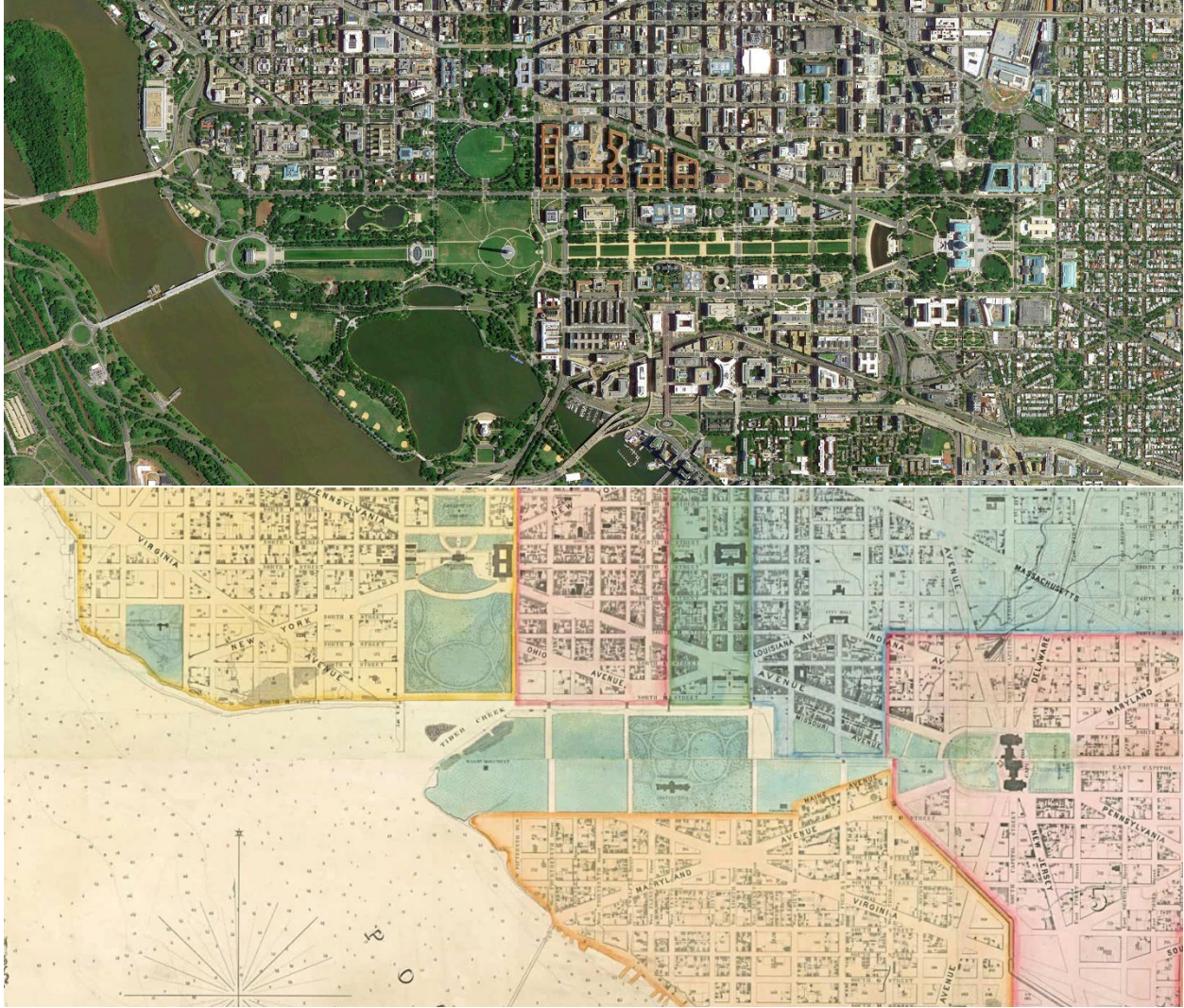


Figure 20: Changing shorelines of the Potomac. Above, a current view of Washington shows vast tracts of reclaimed land in comparison with Albert Boschke's 1857 map.

Compounding with the technologies of industrialized age, Washington also had the privilege of precedent: it had well over a century of similarly scaled earthworks to look back on, including Versailles itself. Its site was no more a challenge than at Versailles, especially in light of engineering advancements of the day; its earthworks were not nearly as extensive and detailed as in the Sun King's garden. Globally speaking, Washington could lay claim few "firsts" in terms of scale, but compared to

unimaginative grid towns, and even to imaginative gridded cities such as Savannah (founded in 1732) and Philadelphia (founded in 1682), the new capital was notable for its ambition.⁴⁹ The Jeffersonian grid is logical, modular, and scalable: all sensible attributes for an agrarian nation of frugal farmers. L'Enfant's massively scaled design blasted past sensibility, opting instead for theatricality and magnificence; one might argue he was looking to the future, predicting a glorious and wealthy future.

L'Enfant's plan did become the foundation for a world power, and Washington's vast geometries befit such a nation, but the methods implemented in establishing these geometries do not project power as Versailles' innovation and resource-intensive construction do. In this sense, it borrows its power of scale from Baroque precedents, but unlike cities like Rome and Paris where dense medieval fabric was sliced through, planners in Versailles and Washington exercised their will on non-urbanized space.⁵⁰ Hence, Le Nôtre's Versailles, where geometric perfection was wrought out of marshy, formless lowland at an unprecedented scale, emerges as the most obvious precedent for the new American capital, a situation Laugier would have found natural and fitting.

Louis XIV's motives behind Versailles' vastness were clear: by creating a beautiful, endless-looking space, he was seeking a place to project his *gloire* like rays of sunlight, trapping potentially rebellious nobles in an expansive gilded cage. The design was to remind them at all times that it was *he* who controlled France: the trees, the water, and even the earth it all rested on. He had help in doing so from the best

⁴⁹ On the Oglethorpe plan of Savannah, see John W. Reps, "C2 + L2 = S2? Another look at the Origins of Savannah's Town Plan," in *Forty Years of Diversity: Essays on Colonial Georgia*, ed. Harvey H. Jackson and Phinizy Spalding (Athens: University of Georgia, 1984), 101–151; Phinizy Spalding, *Oglethorpe in America* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984).

⁵⁰ Paul Zucker, "Space and Movement in High Baroque City Planning," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 14, no. 1 (1955): 8–13.

landscape designers, architects, and artists of his time, but the vision is decidedly his. Not only did he succeed in controlling the nobility, he established a cultural aesthetic for France that was copied, adopted, and enjoyed by his contemporaries and many rulers and governments to follow, from Peter the Great at Peterhof Palace to Schloss Schönbrunn in Vienna. With Versailles, Louis XIV sent a strong message not just to the French nobility but to the world: the vastness of space—all of it—was his to command.

The motives that coaxed Washington DC out from rolling countryside to become a commanding capital city are more diffused than those that produced Versailles. No single figure was responsible for Washington's monumental architecture, colossal axes, and stately vistas. A long list of designers, political leaders, and engineers can be considered "authors" of the design and execution, from L'Enfant to Senator McMillan and beyond. It is more challenging to parse out the intentions of so many stakeholders working in different historical contexts: Were they designing for the glory of the Republic? For their own vanity? For the good of design? In reality, it was probably a mixture of these, and that is what makes Washington such a compelling case study in comparison to Versailles' direct, monarchical roots.

The irony of the similarities between Versailles and Washington remains. These places—built an ocean apart, for different occupants, in different eras, for different audiences, through different methods—are quite similar when it comes to questions of scale. Perhaps the power of scale is less about regime or governing style than it is about places being "special." Norma Evenson explains that, "There will always be a desire for special places and buildings, for monuments that commemorate our

institutions and our ideals.”⁵¹ Versailles and Washington were both designed to be significant, unique places. Their scale—astounding, incomprehensible, and dwarfing to the humans who inhabit them—serve their purpose well. Their command of the land and brilliant monuments showcasing immense human talent for the arts, design, and construction continue to attract tens of millions of visitors annually. They are well-studied by scholars of art and design for their magnificent arrangement of imposing spaces hundreds of years after their establishment. If both Versailles and Washington’s use of scale is intended not just to express power but to establish beautiful, treasured, dynamic spaces, they are a resounding success.

⁵¹ Evenson, “Monumental Spaces,” 30.

CHAPTER 3

ICON

Versailles and Washington are saturated with symbols and icons. Statues of bronze, marble, and lead look out from promontories and dot manicured walks. Heroes on horseback occupy grand intersections and mythical deities spout water from gilded throats. Eagles carry scrolls and arrows, and leviathans slice through man-made lakes, snarling faces staring down onlookers. These monsters, goddesses, animals, and humans work together to prop up a narrative of power: mastery, vastness, might, and immortality. Each element has meaning, and each inconspicuous backstory carries immense weight to a watchful eye. The objects and personifications decorating Versailles and Washington weave great tapestries of sovereignty, building all-encompassing, culture-defining mythologies from simple stone and metal. Yet these figurations are remarkably similar characters in elaborate, carefully written stories about remarkably *different* protagonists. On the one hand, they tell a tale of a king in complete control of an empire and his underlings; on the other, they speak of a country driven by liberty and justice to become a world power.

Somewhat more subtle but just as significant is a different type of symbology evident in both places. The form and styles they take on reach back to borrow power from predecessors like Rome, the greatest empire the Western world has known. Expansive halls lined with columns and axial city plans usher this immense imperial power into the early modern future, breathing life into its memory to strike awe into the hearts of a fresh audience. In a pleasure park like Versailles, terraces and ramps recall military strongholds of the day, subtly communicating not just power, but violence. Numerous equestrian statues of military commanders do the same in Washington. A deeper look at icons and symbols as power in both of these places reveals a broad

exploitation of the human need to create meaning and channel it into controlling narratives. It is clear that the creators of both Versailles and Washington were well aware of this power. The prevailing faith in visual semiotics coupled with a common repertoire of motifs stems from a shared heritage in classical myth and image-making. This shared tradition remains strong through the early twentieth century in Washington DC.

Rome Reborn

From its early days as a republic to its pinnacle as a military dictatorship, Rome has influenced Western culture in innumerable ways. Its story of conquest, elegant architecture, revolutionary infrastructure, fascinating mythology, and formidable military power has appealed to monarchs and republics alike. At Versailles and Washington, Rome's legacy is palpable: classical architecture and shows of military and imperial might saturate the design of both sites as if aspiring to achieve what the Rome once did—that their impact might be so great. From Louis XIV's Roman aqueduct for the Eure project and Versailles' terraces to Washington's neoclassical and Beaux-Arts urban fabric, Rome's legacy of extraordinary built works and war—by extension political and cultural domination—was transformed for contemporary audiences in monarchical France and every era of the United States' existence.

For the Sun King, it seems, glory was cultivated on the battlefield as much as in the garden, and the king gladly took part in military campaigns.⁵² The Louis XIV saw in himself a conqueror as much as a gardener, and of the forty successful sieges his

⁵² For a thorough biography of Louis XIV, particularly regarding his military career, see Philip Mansel, *King of the World the Life of Louis XIV* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2020).

military engineer Sébastien Le Prestre de Vauban (1633–1707) executed under his reign, he was personally present for eighteen of them.⁵³ He commissioned romanticized images of conquest to decorate Versailles: a number of portraits depict him in military attire, whether contemporary body armor and helmets (embellished with gold brocade and ostrich plumes, of course), or Roman-style cuirasses and sandals (fig. 21). The Sun King's love of war was not limited to the portraits and busts lining the halls of the château but spilled abundantly into the gardens.

⁵³ Ian Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 112.



Figure 221: Louis XIV of France being crowned by victory after the 1673 Siege of Maastricht by Pierre Mignard, 1673.

Vauban was Louis XIV's master military engineer, an expert of siege warfare, and a talented designer of earthwork defenses. The Palace of Versailles does not sit atop a star-shaped fortress like those Vauban designed, but elements of fortification planning find their way into gardens. Looking from the Tapis Vert toward the château, one sees a complex but elegant series of terraces, ramps, and retaining walls (fig. 22), carefully engineered to impose formality on the ground and distinctly recalling Vauban's glacises and ramparts. Topiary stand on the top of the walls like battlements or soldiers defending the palace, its pale, rhythmic façade looming over the scene and projecting a distinct sense of control and authority.⁵⁴



Figure 222: Complex terracing and retaining walls on the Latona Parterre. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

⁵⁴ Chandra Mukerji, "Space and Political Pedagogy at the Gardens of Versailles," *Public Culture* 24, no. 3 68 (January 2012): pp. 509–511, <https://doi.org/10.1215/08992363-1630663>.

Versailles' earthworks are arguably the least blatant references to military power in the domain. Dotting the groves and hornbeam-framed walks are busts of Roman and Hellenistic conquerors such as Alexander the Great, Hannibal, and Octavius. Blatantly violent images of conquest occupy several of the garden's outdoor rooms: in the Colonnade Grove, French sculptor Francois Girardon's (1628–1715) *Kidnapping of Proserpina by Pluto* (1677–1699) sexualizes conquest in the center of the circular space, Proserpina's arms outstretched in terror (fig. 23). In the Triumphal Arch Grove, sculptor Jean-Baptiste Tuby's (1635–1700) *Fountain of France Victorious* depicts a gilded France in Roman attire, seated on a Roman chariot, surrounded by various captives and creatures representing a fallen foes like Spain and the Holy Roman Empire. The country's mascots gush water like blood (fig. 24). On the northwest and southwest corners of the Water Parterre, the Daybreak Fountain and Evening Fountain feature similar scenes of death, with four predators taking down four prey, the latter spilling water jets from their mouths, suggesting blood.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Mukerji, "Space and Political Pedagogy at the Gardens of Versailles," *Public Culture* 24 no. 3, 514–515



Figure 223: *The Rape of Proserpina* (1677–1699) by Girardon. Author photograph.



Figure 224: France Victorious in the Triumphal Arch Grove. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

The bloodshed seems to harken back to ancient Rome, notably in the fact that violence was not relegated to battle, a byproduct of conquest, but a form of entertainment: the Colosseum's legacy of slaughtered animals and vanquished enemies is encapsulated in sculpture at Versailles.⁵⁶ The scenes are all beautiful if foreboding; they appear in the same gilded lead and bronze as the playful putti and reclining nymphs elsewhere in the garden. Despite their macabre nature, the scenes are a celebration: triumph over the foes of France and by extension all enemies of Louis XIV. The Sun King's warring nature is evident from Le Brun's triumphal paintings in the Hall of Mirrors to the green expanse of his gardens and is symbolized in a typically artful

⁵⁶ Lauren E. Cowles, "The Spectacle of Bloodshed in Roman Society," *Constructing the Past* 12, no. 1 (2011): pp. 3–4.

way. The scenes send a clear message through artful design: the king is powerful, a true conqueror, successor to Rome and all its military might.

Rare in Louis XIV's adoption of Rome's glory were equestrian statues, but he did commission one from Italian master Gian Lorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) to stand in Versailles' Orangerie. A tradition of equestrian statuary stretches back to ancient Greece, but one of the most well-known examples came from Rome.⁵⁷ The bronze *Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius* (175 CE) depicted a victorious emperor to its Roman audiences and later served as a model for Renaissance depictions of leaders of war and state (fig. 25). Michelangelo (1475–1564) had the sculpture moved to the Piazza del Campidoglio in Rome from the Lateran Palace in 1538 as part of his redesign of Capitoline Hill, achieving prominence and likely further influencing artists of the time.⁵⁸ As it happened, the Sun King hated Bernini's statue, which was apparently too flamboyantly baroque, and had it installed at the far end of the Swiss Lake to the south of the château; in this new position it appears as a white speck from the parterres.⁵⁹ Versailles would not prominently feature an equestrian statue of the Sun King until 1836 following a commission from Louis XVIII (1755–1824) for such a statue to be erected at the Place de la Concorde in Paris in 1816; it was instead installed in the courtyard at Versailles in the absence of the Grille Royale.⁶⁰ As evidenced by the Sun

⁵⁷ Helmut Nickel, "The Emperor's New Saddle Cloth: The Ephippium of the Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius," *Metropolitan Museum Journal* 24 (1989): 17.

⁵⁸ Philipp Fehl, "The Placement of the Equestrian Statue of Marcus Aurelius in the Middle Ages," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 37 (1974): 362-67.

⁵⁹ A fun anecdote: Louis XIV and Bernini had a strained relationship, and the king felt the statue was an "abomination." See Jeanne Morgan Zarucchi, "Bernini And Louis XIV: A Duel of Egos," *Source: Notes in the History of Art* 25, no. 2 (2006): 32-38.

⁶⁰ Following the restoration of the *Grille* in 2008, the statue was moved to the *Place d'Armes*, where it forms a terminus to the central boulevard of the *patte d'oie*.

King's commission by Bernini, sculptures of this nature were popular in the Age of Absolutism but perhaps not typically in gardens.



Figure 225: Equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius, c. 175.

While Washington is decidedly short on statues of animals in their death throes, it exalts in symbols of militaristic conquest in equestrian monuments to generals and sculpted tableaux of battles. The emphasis on equestrian statues may be due to the influence of Roman history on the early American republic.⁶¹ L'Enfant's intention for an equestrian statue to memorialize George Washington (discussed in chapter 2) as what was then the terminus to the Capitol axis in the Mall, i.e., where the Washington Monument now stands, suggests a devotion to the image of General Washington as a victorious leader in battle. While equestrian statues in Europe historically provided a focus for town squares, L'Enfant was planning to situate the statue in the gardenlike environs of the Mall in Washington. He essentially advocated for a statue of George Washington as an "American Caesar" in the center of an urban garden. His vision for an equestrian statue for George Washington in this location was never realized, but prominent martial images eventually stood in the heart of Washington.

One such image stands just a few hundred feet from the White House. Comparable to Bernini's statue of Louis XIV and other dramatic militaristic sculptures is *Andrew Jackson* (1852), an equestrian statue of the seventh president by American, the first of four identical monuments by sculptor Clark Mills (1810–1883). Following Jackson's death in 1845, editor of the *United States Magazine and Democratic Review* John L. O'Sullivan called for a bronze equestrian statue to be built in his honor. Mills submitted a model for the monument in 1848 and won the commission, devoting the

⁶¹ Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995); Maria Wyke, *Caesar in the USA* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).

next four years to casting the grand composition.⁶² Not on the Mall, but instead in the center of Lafayette Square, just to the north of the White House, the statue presides over park planned conceived as a part of pleasure garden for the executive mansion, a parallel to Versailles' south parterre.⁶³ Jackson rises over Lafayette Square on a marble base, waving his bicorn hat as his steed rears on two legs. It is a dynamic composition, full of military pomp. Four cannons surround its base, a clear celebration of then-General Jackson's victory against the British at the Battle of New Orleans in 1815. Eight years after Mills' *Jackson* took its place in Lafayette Square, the city received an equestrian statue of George Washington. Authorized by Congress to celebrate the centennial of George Washington's birth, the statue was to decorate Washington Circle, one of the city circles in L'Enfant's plan that are analogous to Versailles' outdoor rooms. Washington Circle lies to the northwest of the White House along Pennsylvania Avenue. Though embodying some of the neo-baroque dynamism of Mills' depiction of Jackson, Washington appears calmer and more resolute compared to Jackson's cap-waving form. His horse is not rearing on two legs, though its mane and tail appear dramatically windblown. Nevertheless, perhaps the similarities between the two statues are due to the fact that both were modeled on the painting *Napoleon Crossing the Alps* (1801) by Jacques-Louis David (1748–1825).⁶⁴ Both statues by Mills represent a clear attachment to images of power derived from European examples of war heroes and absolutists, and by extension, their Roman predecessors (figs. 26 and 27). They embody a dramatic

⁶² James M. Goode, "Four Salutes to the Nation," White House Historical Association, accessed November 21, 2020, <https://www.whitehousehistory.org/four-salutes-to-the-nation>.

⁶³ "Lafayette Square," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior), accessed November 17, 2020, <https://www.nps.gov/nr/travel/wash/dc30.htm>.

⁶⁴ Thomas J. Brown, "Models of Leadership," In *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America*, 130–85, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

masculinity and commanding presence: highly baroque interpretations of ancient Roman militarism commemorating the births and deaths of elected leaders of the young Republic close to the presidential abode echoing the all too Italian baroque drama of Bernini's Louis XIV now standing at a removed distance from the palace.



Figure 226: The equestrian statue of George Washington in Washington Circle. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 227: The equestrian statue of Andrew Jackson in Lafayette Square. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

More comparable to Marcus Aurelius' calm demeanor on his second-century equestrian mount is the Ulysses S. Grant monument. It embodies a less pompous, more resolute interpretation of equestrian statue. As discussed in chapter two, the sculpture is part of a memorial which depicts the Civil War general and eighteenth president of the United States who died in 1877. It was not constructed until 1902–1924, an age of rapid industrialization, growing government, and progressive politics in American history. The Ulysses S. Grant Memorial, sculpted by Henry Shrady, is a large composition overlooking the Capitol Reflecting Pool. In this position, it is similar to the water parterre at Versailles, providing an airy space at the foot of the Capitol. The

McMillan plan proposed the site become an open plaza with formal plantings, but the monument instead consists of a linear platform of granite and marble, punctuated on its north and south termini by sculpture groups depicting Civil War soldiers in the heat of battle. In the middle of the platform, surrounded by four bronze lions, a tall plinth rises and provides a perch for the image of Grant on horseback. To the north and south are dramatic, dynamic sculpture groups entitled *Cavalry Charge* and *Artillery* executed in the style of realism. Despite the exuberance and monumental scale of his surroundings, Grant appears calm. His horse stands on all fours, and his costume is without frills (fig. 28). This iconography is a rhetorical statement that America's wars are fought by everyday citizens, including the contemporary World War, a trope that goes back to Revolutionary-era monuments such as Jean-Antoine Houdon's statue *George Washington* (1784–96) for the Virginia State Capitol.⁶⁵ The monument is austere and striking, a somber counterpoint to some of its more melodramatic architectural and sculptural neighbors in the core of Washington—from the Jackson and Washington statues to the neo-baroque Capitol dome rising to its east—but honors Grant more as a military general than as president. A Roman tradition of honoring leaders as warriors pervades, if in a more subtle fashion.

⁶⁵ Robert Hughes, *American Visions: The Epic History of Art in America* (New York: Knopf, 1999), 123–126.



*Figure 228: Ulysses S. Grant Memorial completed by Henry Shredy in 1924.
Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.*

The glories of war are on proud display both in Versailles and, with the notable exception of Maya Lin's Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1981–82), in Washington as well. They are filtered through the lens of imagined Roman ancestors and carried forth in celebrations of demonstrations of strength, control and military power—and by extension, death. While Versailles blatantly celebrates the fall of France's foes, Washington's war heroes are celebrated for their victories over faceless enemies—thousands of invisible lost lives, including brutally conquered Native American peoples who did not quite fit into a victor's narrative let alone, following Jackson's signing of the Indian Removal Act in 1830, "his" land. The leaders of both empires borrowed power from their predecessors, manifesting a Roman-scale command of the world through intimidating statuary and dramatic shows of hypermasculine strength. From the fortress-like terraces and bleeding animals at Versailles to the proud horseback-mounted generals in Washington, a Roman tradition of celebrating military might fills both spaces with a distinct air of power and conquest. Louis XIV's mission of full monarchical control makes his intentions clear: the shows of strength at Versailles' garden are messages of glory and fear, warnings to his enemies and blessings to his allies. Whether Washington's leaders triumph on horseback in the Mall or near the White House for the good of the people or for their own glory matters not. As they tower over onlookers and impress the message that their strength puts them above the common people, they become god-heroes to be venerated—not unlike their Roman predecessors.

Ancient Style, New Power

A surefire, if often subtle method of accruing power through space is achieved by referencing the glories of the past in architectural style. Militaristic images in Washington and Versailles are but a small sample of each site's masterful implementation of borrowed historical power.⁶⁶ The architecture that occupies both spaces—from palaces and pavilions to monuments and memorials—draws heavily from their Greek and Roman predecessors. Many architectural scholars have studied the ongoing history of classically derived styles and the political systems that embrace them; this paper instead explores the experiential implications of the power such architecture generates within Washington's and Versailles' landscapes. At both sites, architecture is neither passive nor divorced from its landscape: it forms focal termini, defines axes, and bounds space. On the one hand, the use of classical styles is logical for both Louis XIV and the United States: as we have seen, the former saw his France as carrying the mantle of Rome, and the latter loosely modeled its government on the democracy and republic of ancient Greece and Rome, respectively. On the other, classical architecture's complicity with society's power structures is all too easily accepted as part of the natural course of history.

A young America's roots in England explain the prevalence of Palladian and neoclassical styles in public structures, as the styles defined architectural form in Britain from the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries, carrying connotations of elevated class

⁶⁶ Though it focuses more on classical sculpture, the following essay explains Greco-Roman art's prevalence in Western empires well: Caroline Vout, "Roman Art, the Building Blocks of Empire," in *Classical Art: A Life History from Antiquity to the Present*, (Princeton; Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2018), pp. 71–96.

standing and control with them.⁶⁷ It is logical that designers in the United States would look to their inherited traditions of architecture, and look back they did, from the construction of Thornton's neoclassical Capitol at the turn of the nineteenth century to the white marble-punctuated Senate Parks Commission's 1901 plan for the National Mall (the last major architectural element of which, the Jefferson Memorial, was completed in 1943). Of course, one argument would hold that a landscape punctuated with Greco-Roman Revival architecture was one that harkened back to the models of participatory government offered by ancient Greece and Rome. This kind of associationism makes sense for the period of the Enlightenment and the early nineteenth century. But the architecture of Washington, particularly along the National Mall, continues to be blatantly inspired by Greco-Roman styles of building well into the twentieth century, whether strict neoclassicism like the Herbert C. Hoover building (1932, designed by Bennett, Parsons, and Frost) or its frillier Beaux-Arts cousin as demonstrated by the U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration Building (1908, designed by Rankin, Kellogg, and Crane)(figs. 29 and 30). Columns, pediments, and symmetry saturate the National Mall with an air of authority and presumed timelessness, tying the United States to its Greek and Roman predecessors through classical form and ornament. The forms also lend a sense of rhythm and cohesion, demonstrating the nation's ability to synthesize a large, costly, formally consistent capital over two centuries. Power is demonstrated through resources in both the large and small scale, from miles-long swathes of classical facades to intricate, skilled labor-

⁶⁷ For more on classical architecture's association with society's elite and powerful in England, see Dana Arnold, "On Classical Ground: Histories of Style," in *Reading Architectural History* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 83–106.

intensive ornamental details wrought from stone. The sense of weight and permanence demonstrated by classical buildings in Washington imply that they are as immovable and unchangeable as American domination, a legacy as sure as Rome's written in stone along the banks of the Potomac.



Figure 229: The Herbert C. Hoover Building. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.



Figure 30: The U.S. Department of Agriculture Administration Building. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

Versailles has fewer architectural “pavilions” at real-life scale than Washington does, but the impact of the architecture of the château façade within the garden merits discussion. The garden façade of Versailles presides over the landscape magnificently, a huge backdrop like the edge of a forest in the greenery that spreads around it. The edifice predates Neo-Palladianism, of course, but its style—aptly called by some historians the “Style Louis XIV” or academic classicism—is not without a certain Palladian reserve despite its scale. Designed by Louis Le Vau with additions from Jules Hardouin-Mansart and Charles Le Brun, the vast western face of the palace echoes classical staples of symmetry, proportion, and rhythm. Perfectly repeating rows of high arched windows are punctuated by pilasters and porticoes in a variation of the Ionic

order accented with floral motifs. French Baroque tends to concern itself more with establishing hierarchy than with perfect classical details.⁶⁸ Versailles' garden façade lays this emphasis bare, as the *piano noble* of the palace dominates the composition, dwarfing the ground and attic floors, an artfully accented contrast with the former's rustication and the latter's balustraded, sculpture-punctuated roofline. The center of the façade steps forward with paired freestanding columns, each surmounted by statues. This frontispiece marks the main axis of the entire site as it passes from the city side, through Louis' *chambre*, to the infinite horizon. The façade's arches, columns and pilasters, symmetry, as well as its disciplined, staunchly symmetrical proportions, invent an ideal precedent with ancient Roman roots that by-passes the contemporary architecture of baroque Rome to realize Louis XIV's mission to accrue power around himself through space and classical architecture. When one is close to the massive wall of the château, it seems to look over the gardens imposingly, but its distinct relationship with the lanes and parterres of the gardens, as noted in chapter one, make it integral to the composition of the landscape. The château yokes the garden to the king in a near-constant reminder of he who once dwelled in the very center of its flawless symmetry: the Sun King. Through classical form, Louis XIV used Versailles to solidify his absolutist reign and his status as the embodiment of the state.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Kathleen James-Chakraborty, "Northern Baroque." In *Architecture since 1400* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 157–164.

⁶⁹ Louis Marin and Anna Lehman, "Classical, Baroque: Versailles, or the Architecture of the Prince," *Yale French Studies*, no. 80 (1991): 167–82.



Figure 30: A very small portion of Versailles' garden facade from the Parterre du Midi. Author photograph.

The neoclassical and French baroque architectural forms of Washington and Versailles reiterate Rome's glories for early modern and modern audiences. They reinforce the concept that both governments aspired to achieve the glories of Rome's great empire and to accomplish such influence on the world stage. The classical pavilions, palaces, and monuments of both spaces impact the experience of the landscape significantly, providing timeless, permanent, elegant foci, backdrops, and shelter. The legacy of ancient Rome—and by extension its Greek predecessors—works to establish a deep sense of power in Washington and Versailles, one that reaches back through centuries and ancestries to remind audiences what can be accomplished by government. The architectural forms of the U.S. capital and the Sun King's seat of

power are neither passive, predictable imitation nor absent-minded reference: they are intentional, purposeful media through which minds were primed for new stories that would be created from old myths and embedded in the landscape.

Apollo and Versailles

Washington and Versailles use the landscape and the buildings that enrich it to weave half-true tales of power. The constructed spaces are stage sets not only for people but for statues, fountains, and sculptures that inhabit and enliven land and architecture. More importantly, they introduce narrative and personify otherwise abstract concepts like freedom and divinity. Roman mythology plays a pivotal role in storytelling in both Washington and Versailles. In the U.S. capital, the Roman goddess Libertas or Liberty was reiterated and refined as Freedom or Columbia, a woman embodying America, bedecked in stars and eagle feathers: a human face on an amorphous idea. At Versailles, the very human (and long-dead) Louis XIV lives on in various narratives as the Greek then Roman god Apollo: the sun, bringer of light and harmony, spreading glory and fear with a strum of his lyre or draw of his bow. As significant as architecture is to each place, Rome's greatest contribution to the iconography of Washington and Versailles may well be through classical mythology. Just as Rome's Emperors were both human and god, flesh and legend, Louis XIV was mortal man and Apollo. The founding fathers of the United States followed suit, becoming deathless demi-gods in American civic religion through image and icon. Just as Rome made myth material through design, Apollo and Columbia impress power upon Versailles and Washington.

From gilded iron entrance gates to the far reaches of the garden, visitors to Versailles then and now found it difficult to miss classical imagery, especially likenesses of Apollo. The Greek-turned-Roman sun god's face is stamped into paneling in the King's Apartments; Apollo rides his chariot out of the *Bassin d'Apollon* at the center of Versailles' main axis. The sun god rests in an artificial grotto while sea nymphs tend to him and bathe his horses. Louis XIV is known as the Sun King for his adoption of Apollo's image, and it is an image he utilized extensively both inside his palace and in its gardens. The monarch's association with the sun is logical; the sun is illuminating, life-bringing, and constant. Out of the chaos of Louis XIV's childhood (explored later through the Latona Fountain), he rose like the sun to bring stability and prosperity to his kingdom.⁷⁰ With most parallels between the sun god and the Sun King being drawn relatively early in his reign, the statues, fountains, and symbols tying the two at Versailles served as a sort of self-fulfilling prophecy. This prophecy speaks of power: the determination of a single man to become a powerful government, the stable sun, and an immortal god all at once. Louis XIV's successful implementation of absolutism and Versailles' continued identity as seat of the Sun King speak to the success and

⁷⁰ Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*, 49.

longevity of this power.



Figure 31: Louis XIV and the Royal Family, 1670 by Jean Nocret. Louis XIV is depicted as Apollo, surrounded by the royal family as various other mythological figures.

The association of Apollo with Bourbon monarchs began not with Louis XIV but with his father, Louis XIII. The older Louis' relation to the sun god was not quite so prevalent as his successor's. Neither Versailles—a simple hunting lodge at the time—nor his other royal residences such as Fontainebleau and the Louvre contained considerable Apollonian imagery, but pieces of art made in his honor did. Commemorative medallions dating from as early as 1618 justify Louis XIII's arrested killing of nobleman Concino Concini by comparing it to Apollo slaying the

Python.⁷¹ Louis XIII also appeared in portraiture with a crown of laurels, which was often associated with Apollo, but his use of the sun god's iconography does not go much farther than these images (fig. 33). Decoration associating Louis XIII with the god of the sun, music, and poetry might have inspired Louis XIV and the artists in his service to enhance and expand on this mythology, appealing to a broad audience and communicating a wide array of concepts.

⁷¹ "Louis XIII, King of France (Medal)," V&A Search the Collections (Victoria and Albert Museum), accessed October 13, 2020, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O313794/louis-xiii-king-of-france-medal-unknown/>.



Figure 32: Louis XIII by Simon Vouet, crowned with laurel leaves. From Wikimedia Commons.

Charles Le Brun, Louis XIV's court painter, was responsible for Versailles' Apollo iconography in several media. Primarily from 1664 to 1671, Louis XIV and his artistic collaborators expanded significantly on his predecessor's King-as-Apollo trope. Le Brun contributed considerably to the iconographic program of the Bosquets and fountains,

providing sketches of statuary for sculptors—principally Tuby, Girardon, and Gaspard (1624–1681) and Balthazar Marsy (1628–1674). Le Brun worked with Le Notre and Italian fountain engineers Francois (1617–1688) and Pierre Francine (1654–1720)⁷², to bring some of the statues to life with water play.⁷³ While Le Notre and Louis XIV himself were responsible for the grand vistas, geometries, and overall creative vision of the gardens and bosquets, Le Brun made the formal qualities of the landscape articulate messages of greater precision through his iconographical programming.⁷⁴

⁷² Gallicized from Francisco and Pietro Francini to reflect their service to the French court.

⁷³ “The Francine Family,” Palace of Versailles, September 26, 2018, <http://en.châteauversailles.fr/discover/history/great-characters/francine-family>.

⁷⁴ Thompson, *Sun King’s Garden*, 69.



Figure 33: Pierre-Denis Martin, *View of Versailles from the Place d'Armes*, ca. 1722, showing the Grille d'Honneur (foreground) and the Grille Royale before it was removed in 1771 or 1772.

That Versailles was home to a modern-day Apollo begins with reliefs of the sun god's face on the gilded iron Grille d'Honneur ("Gate of Honor"), and probably continued with similar imagery on the original Grille Royale ("Royal Gate"). Both gates form thresholds on the east side of the château, as seen in Pierre-Denis Martin's painting, *Versailles Seen from the Place d'Armes* of ca. 1722 (fig. 11). The original Grille Royale

was taken down in 1771 or 1772 to allow for the construction of the Gabriel Wing and the Dufour Pavilion, but reconstituted with a copy in 2008.⁷⁵ Sixteen copies of Apollo's visage glow within the Grille Royale at Versailles: gilded faces, radiant sunbeams, and flowing hair reflecting brilliant daylight (fig. 36). Like the sun rising, Apollo's golden-yellow gleaming countenances on the gates marked the eastern horizon of Versailles and announced the classicized reign of Louis XIV and other French monarchs.

⁷⁵ Not without controversy: <http://www.thearttribune.com/Inauguration-of-the-Grille-Royale.html>

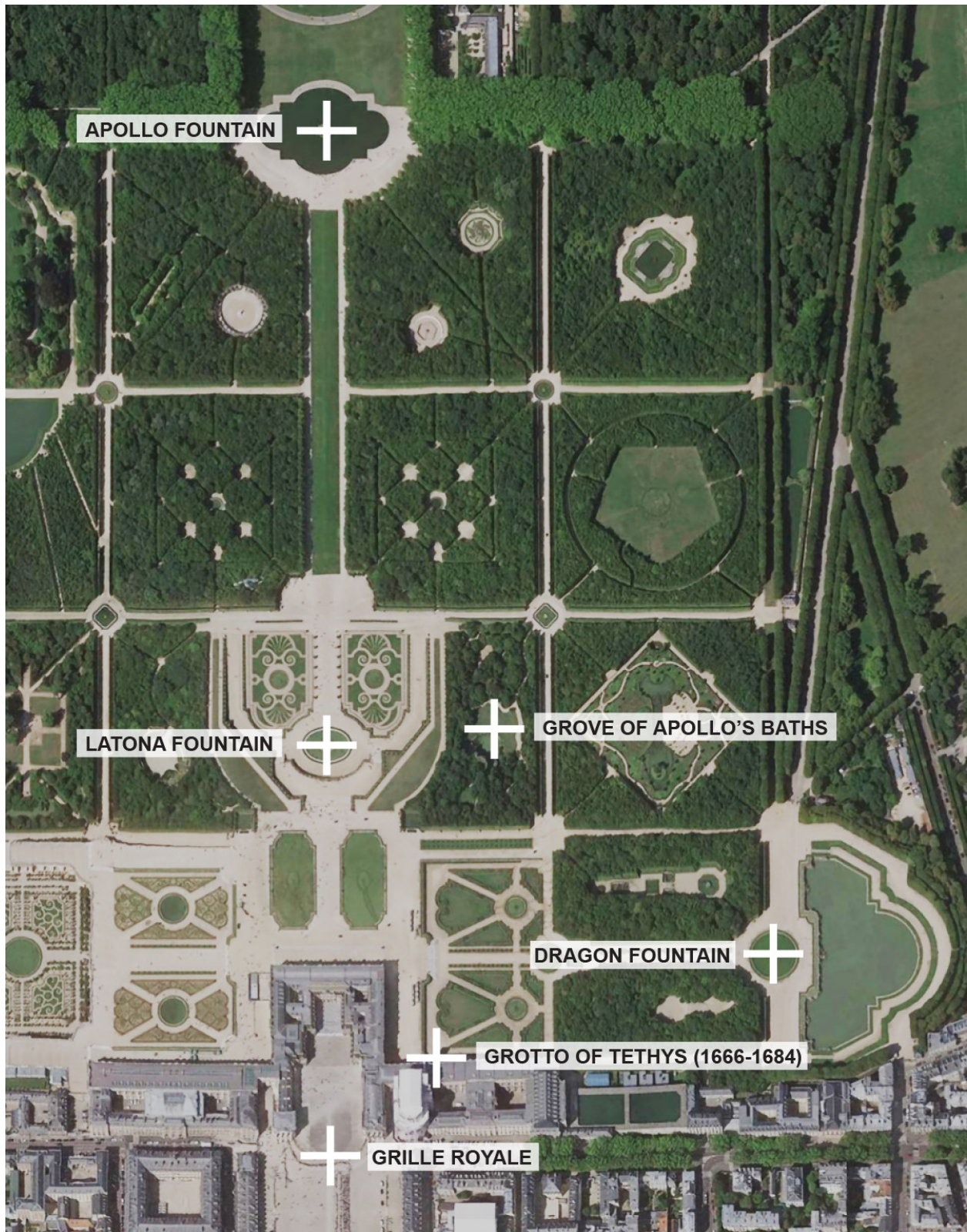


Figure 34: Key plan for following elements.



Figure 35: Apollo icon within the Grille Royale. Author photo.

Behind the Grille Royale rises the eastern façade of Versailles, where other classical heroes bask in Apollo's golden aura. The morning light illuminates gilded rooflines, balustrades, and dormer windows. Gold is sprinkled like solid sunlight across blue slate shingles and reflects on the marble pavement of the Cour de Marbre. The center of the façade is crowned by a central sculpture group realized in 1679 by Marsy and Girardon, consisting of reclining figures of Hercules and Mars surrounded by helmets and shields framing a centerpiece in the form of a large, bold clock face. Encircled by a wreath of gilded laurel, Apollo's face rests on a field of blue, solar rays and clock hands radiating out behind him.⁷⁶ The clock was frozen at the time of the King's death until the nineteenth century, and rests just above his bedroom at the central axis of the palace. This position is symbolic: Louis XIV is at the center of this composition as both mortal and Apollo, king and sun. He is the focal point of the Cour de Marbre, reinforced by the warriors Hercules and Mars. This juxtaposition of Apollo's harmony, light, and beauty with the violence of combat further advances the narrative that a king at the center of the world was a warrior, a designer, a dancer, a shaper of tastes, and a ruler all at once. The message was clear to his original audience and echoes similarly to viewers today: you are entering Louis XIV's domain, a man of strength and splendor. Not every image of Apollo within Versailles is so uncontested, however.

Through the palace to the west, along the main axis of Versailles, the Latona Fountain rises like a polychrome marble wedding cake, telling a tale involving a much

⁷⁶ Beatrix Saule, "Versailles Décor Sculpté Extérieur," *Château de Versailles, catalogue des décors sculptés extérieurs - Mars et Hercule au repos, allégories à Louis XIV victorieux (copies) - François Girardon Gaspard Marsy (Palace of Versailles)*, accessed October 13, 2020, <http://www.sculpturesversailles.fr/html/5b/selection/notice-ensemble.php?numloc=0101020601>.

more vulnerable Apollo (fig. 38), but one that served as a warning to seditious nobles nonetheless. The Bassin de Latone was inspired by the story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of Latona and her children by Jupiter, Apollo and Diana. In this legend, Latona wanders the earth with her young children, stopping in Lycia to drink from a pond. The peasants there harass her and her children, stirring the mud at the bottom to prevent them from drinking, and she cries out to Jupiter to punish their cruelty. He complies, turning the peasants into frogs. The fountain is a jarring representation of the myth, each tier decorated with gilded lead lizards, frogs, and peasants crying out mid-transformation (fig. 37 and 38). Sculpted by the Marsy brothers in 1668 with modifications by Hardouin-Mansart between 1687 and 1689, the fountain is crowned with a sculpture group depicting Latona embracing her young children.⁷⁷ This narrative and its composition in the Bassin de Latone was a metaphor for the *Fronde*, the series of bloody civil wars and unrest on the part of nobles opposed to Louis XIV that marred his childhood between 1648 and 1653 and traumatized his mother, Anne of Austria (1601–1666). Louis XIV's association with Apollo strengthens the symbolism of the story, driving home the message that the Fronde was a grave mistake and that the nobility would be met with swift retribution if they dared harm the monarch or his family again.

⁷⁷ Thompson, *Sun King's Garden*, 158.



Figure 36: The Latona fountain, detail. Photo by the Château de Versailles.



Figure 37: The Latona fountain. Photo by the Château de Versailles.

Across the Tapis Vert from the Latona Fountain is the most triumphant version of Apollo visible in the gardens: the Bassin d'Apollon (fig. 39). Designed by Le Brun and executed by Tuby in the same years as the Latona Fountain, the Apollo Basin replaced an artificial pond created in 1639 with the bucolic name Pond of the Swans. The new composition drew on popular themes of the era centering around dawn and light-bringing, with heroic figures chasing away the night. It depicts Apollo pulling the sun across the heavens in a golden chariot. Le Brun likely drew again from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which mentions the sun god's daily duty to bring light to the world. Facing east toward the château, the youthful god rises from a quatrefoil basin, driving his chariot of the sun out of the "sea," ready to launch across the sky. Tritons and dolphins erupt in front of he and his four horses, clearing the way with roars and blasts from conches. Pumped water brings the scene to life, blasting from the Tritons' horns, spilling from the sea monsters' mouths, and splashing out from the chariot and the horses' rearing legs. Even at times when the fountains are not turned on, the group is dynamic and lively, but the addition of water brings the drama to a fever pitch. It is a significant focal point along the garden's central axis as the last element before the Grand Canal lifts the eye to the horizon. One anomaly in its design is that the chariot faces east rather than charging westward like the rising sun, but the composition is far more dramatic with an orientation toward the château. In this way the deity turns to face his earthly avatar. The meaning of the Apollo fountain is relatively straightforward; Louis XIV is the sun god, dutifully and powerfully driving his chariot forward each day, bringing

light to the world below.⁷⁸ This is Apollo as glory-bringer, not warrior as in the next fountain: the Bassin du Dragon.



Figure 38: the Apollo Fountain. Photograph by Fred Romero.

Returning to the château and looking north toward the end of the Allée d'Eau (fig. 35), courtiers glimpsed a violent sculpted encounter between Apollo and an all but vanquished otherworldly beast in the Dragon Fountain (1667). It depicts Apollo slaying the Python. As told by Roman author Hyginus (c. 64 BCE–17 CE), a jealous Hera sent the serpent Python to torment the pregnant Latona, chasing her across the land and preventing her from giving birth to Apollo and Diana safely. The adult Apollo hunted the beast down, slaying it with his arrow as vengeance for his mother's fear. The climax of this story, as told at the Dragon Fountain, centers on a large circular pool accented with

⁷⁸ Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*, 47–48.

a statue of a great serpent in its death throes, spouting “blood” 27 meters into the air. The fountain boasts the highest jet in the garden; all other waterworks must be shut off for it to reach its full height. Sculpted by Gaspard Marsy, the dragon is surrounded by four dolphins and four cherubs mounted on swans who seem to celebrate the beast’s death; the scene’s delight and awe is underscored by a macabre meaning (fig. 40). The beast has fallen to Apollo’s bow, and mirrors the imagery of Louis XIII slaying the Python that represented Concini (mentioned above). Creatures like the dragon symbolized disorder and destruction to the early modern audience of Louis XIV. The monarch’s adoption of Apollo’s order and harmony was another reminder that the chaos of the Fronde was slain by the power of absolute monarchy—the Sun King’s monarchy.⁷⁹ It was a familiar message to the French nobility: if one sows monstrous disorder in the Sun King’s realm, one will pay in blood.

⁷⁹ Baridon, *A History of the Gardens of Versailles*, 48.



Figure 39: *The dragon in its death throes*. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

Contrasting with the violence of the Dragon Fountain was one of the most delightful elements of the early Versailles years by contemporary accounts: the *Grotte de Tethys* (begun 1666). Tragically lost due to the necessary expansion of the palace in 1684, the *Grotte de Tethys* stood where the North Wing of the palace is today. Likely designed by Louis Le Vau, the arched structure of the grotto served a dual purpose as a water tower to supply sufficient gravity for fountains in the gardens and a cool, shady, fantastical pleasure pavilion. It was completed in 1672, and visitors such as André Félibien (1619–1695), official court historian to Louis XIV, were reportedly enamored with its spectacular scene (fig. 41).⁸⁰ The theming of the grotto, as designed by Le Brun,

⁸⁰ For a detailed firsthand account of the Grotto of Tethys see André Félibien, *Description De La Grotte De Versailles* (Paris: Imprimerie royale, 1679).

was inspired by a passage in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in which Apollo rests at the end of his long journey across the sky in the cave of Tethys, a sea goddess.⁸¹ A grouping of statues by sculptors Girardon and Thomas Regnaudin (1622–1706) depicted Apollo and his horses being bathed and tended to by sea nymphs and tritons (fig. 18). The statues sat within three arcades at the rear of the grotto, surrounded by intricate shell, bead, and pebble mosaics. Corals and rockwork decorated niches and wall panels, enhancing a strong sense of the sea. Water games by the Francine brothers filled the entire grotto: great gushes of water flowed from the statue groupings and masks on pilasters, jets shot up from between pebbles on the floor, and a water organ played sounds of sea life.⁸² No trace of the Latona Fountain's grotesque curse or the Dragon Fountain's bloody maw disturb the tranquility of Tethys' Grotto, nor were there any messages of violence or domination highlighting Louis XIV's power as a military commander. The artificial sea cave was instead a place purely for enjoyment: a reminder that the king has as much power to give as to take, and that those in his good graces may see wonders beyond their wildest dreams.

⁸¹ Often spelled "Thetis."

⁸² Information comes from Félibien, *Description De La Grotte De Versailles*.



Figure 40: Interior of the Grotto of Tethys. Engraving by Jean le Pautre (1676). From Wikimedia Commons.

Louis XIV's identity as the Sun King is a golden thread running through Versailles. It ties the statuary, fountains, mythology, and iconographic program together, completing the portrait of a man as not just a king, but a god. Features like the Latona and Dragon Fountains warn of the power of the king to strike down his enemies; elements like the Apollo Fountain and Grotto of Tethys celebrate the glories of a prosperous kingdom led by a glorious king, inspiring their audiences to bow and bend so as to receive a stray beam of his splendor. Versailles' Apollonian imagery reveals a deeply human strategy of cultivating power through shared meaning. Louis XIV grew to represent harmony, illumination, stability, and consistency to his seventeenth-century audience by directly tying his image and his seat of power to the mythology of an ever-youthful, beautiful, immortal Apollo. He secured an absolutist, domestically peaceful

reign by projecting an image as powerful as the sun. Louis XIV's legacy as the Sun King and as the point of light around which Versailles continues to orbit is a testament to the power of the imagery that he and his team of artists and designers created. Although the king did it exceptionally well, he is not the only leader to implement mythology through imagery in his seat of power. Across the Atlantic, amidst vast Baroque geometries recalling Versailles' own diagonals, Washington's mythology unfolds in a subtly similar manner.

Columbia and Washington

The United States' lack of a king made establishing an iconographic program as cohesive as Louis XIV's unrealistic. This fact, coupled with the young republic's resistance to overtly monarchical imagery, easily explains the absence of an Apollonian equivalent for Washington. While lacking one individual hero, the capital is nevertheless rich with symbolism, iconography, and all the power generated from old and new mythologies they propagate. Instead of a single borrowed god, Washington implements a pantheon of god-heroes, from Freedom personified to the Founding Fathers. The figures combine to create a mythological "family," rather than a single persona, for the new nation, one far more multivalent than Apollo at Versailles and just as potent. Columbia, a hypertextual figure (comparable to the United Kingdom's Britannia or France's Marianne) representing the Americas and subsequently the United States from the sixteenth century, could be a fitting stand-in for Apollo in Washington—a goddess uniting the heroes represented there in bronze and marble.



Figure 42: key plan for the National Mall.

High above the Potomac River's floodplain in the city on the proverbial hill (Mathew 5:14), the *Statue of Freedom* (modeled 1854–1857; cast 1860–1862) watches from the top of the Capitol's vast dome as Washington's streets stretch out to the horizon. While officially called Freedom, the figure can easily be equated to Columbia and the Roman goddess Liberty, all of whom share common attributes such as classical garb, stars, and laurels in American iconography.⁸³ The architect of the Capitol's new dome, Thomas U. Walter, specified a monumental statue of the goddess Liberty to crown the dome. Thomas Crawford (1814–1857), an American sculptor, was commissioned to design the statue. From her high perch, *Freedom's* twenty feet of cast

⁸³ For a detailed history of Columbia and Liberty as symbols of America, see John Higham, "Indian Princess and Roman Goddess: The First Female Symbols of America," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 100, no. 50 (1990).

bronze rises dark against a blue sky (fig. 43). She wears a classical gown and is draped with a heavy fringed robe recalling Native American motifs. She is crowned by with a Roman-style helm in the form of an eagle encircled by stars and plumed with feathers, again referencing Native American costume. In Crawford's first iteration, she wore the liberty cap of a Roman freedman, but the subtext of slavery in the United States was all too clear and too inflammatory for southern senators, and feathers replaced the cap.⁸⁴ She holds two objects representing peace and war, respectively: in her left hand, a laurel wreath of victory; in her right, a sword.⁸⁵ This juxtaposition recalls the dual messaging of Apollo at Versailles: glory and fear. Freedom, representing America, holds both in her hands, ensuring onlookers that she is in control, and that liberty always prevails.

⁸⁴ Vivien Green Fryd, "Political Compromise in Public Art: Thomas Crawford's *Statue of Freedom*," in *Critical Issues in Public Art: Content, Context and Controversy*, ed. Harriet Senie and Sally Webster (New York: Smithsonian Books, 1992) 104–115

⁸⁵ "The Statue of Freedom," Architect of the Capitol, accessed October 20, 2020, <https://www.aoc.gov/explore-capitol-campus/art/statue-freedom>.



Figure 41: The Statue of Freedom perched high on the Capitol. Photograph from the Architect of the Capitol.

The *Statue of Freedom* is the most blatant mythological hero visible at Washington, but three of her neighbors on the National Mall have taken on a similarly mythical form: George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and Abraham Lincoln. The three great leaders are long dead, but they have been immortalized in stone in the heart of Washington. They live on in an idealized, mythologized fashion in the history and collective memory of America; their immortality is reinforced by the presence of massive, pristine architectural monuments in Washington. The most glaring presence in the city is the one whose name it takes: George Washington.

Building a monument to the victorious general of the Revolution and first president the United States was no simple task. From L'Enfant's equestrian statue in his master plan (discussed in chapter two) to Congressman and Chief Justice John Marshall's (1755–1835) proposal in 1799 for a tomb for Washington in the Rotunda of the Capitol, disagreements about design of a monument to this American founder, coupled with a lack of funds, stalled the project for decades. But, in 1833, a group of citizens formed the Washington National Monument Society and rapidly raised donations, and in 1836 they announced a design competition for the memorial. Robert Mills won the competition with a proposal for an obelisk surrounded by a circular Doric colonnade in the same position as L'Enfant's equestrian statue. It was to be massive—600 feet tall and at that time the highest man-made structure in the world. Even accounting for the hill upon which the Capitol sits, the tip of the Washington monument rises 209 feet above the dome's pinnacle, a height Versailles reached only in the jets of some fountains. This immense height was a condition of the competition: Washington was venerated by the Washington National Monument Society, who felt a monument of

such awesome scale was the best way to memorialize such a great man. Their ambition would generate a number of problems and drag construction out over many years, but it did resolve any uneasy feelings over connotations of royalty that could have arisen from the equestrian statue on the Mall. From the beginning of the project, financial and political issues plagued construction: funds ran out in 1854, halting construction; the Civil War then saw all building projects in the Capital halt with the exception of the new Capitol building and its dome. In 1879, work resumed, but the colonnade was eliminated following disagreements over funding and the design direction of the monument.⁸⁶ Upon its completion in 1884, it surpassed the Cologne Cathedral's 515-foot spires by 40 feet, becoming the tallest building in the world.⁸⁷

The Washington Monument's presence on the National Mall is arresting—it rises out of a turf-covered hillock sharply and forcefully, clean lines and pure geometry of white boldly contrasting with its park-like surroundings and more ornamental neighbors such as the Capitol (fig. 44). Visible for miles, its form and historical references impress a distinct feeling of power, and its scale makes these references unescapable. The obelisk references ancient Egypt and ancient Rome. A formal shape such as the Egyptian obelisk sublimated personality in geometry while call up associations to the numerous obelisks Roman emperors brought to Rome from Egypt as trophies of conquest and symbols of the sun's power. It also recalls antiquarian and proto-archaeologist Anne Claude de Caylus' (1692–1765) reconstruction of the Mausoleum of Halicarnassus. The circular Doric colonnade Mills intended for the building may also

⁸⁶ "History & Culture - Washington Monument," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2019), <https://www.nps.gov/wamo/learn/historyculture/index.htm>.

⁸⁷ Const. 1248–1880, in large part completed in 1842–80 as a celebration of the recent foundation of modern German nationhood.

reference Hadrian's Mausoleum (134–139 CE).⁸⁸ These references suggest Washington's immortality by elevating him to an ancient, mythical level of authority. These forms are also deeply tied to historical concepts of empire—a fitting reminder that the United States was becoming a world power and would strive for all the glories of Egypt and Rome.

⁸⁸ Scott, "'This Vast Empire'," 50–52.



Figure 42: the Washington Monument. A change around the bottom third of the shaft marks the 1857 pause in construction and future change in quarry. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

To the west of the Washington Monument, across the mirrored surface of the Reflecting Pool, the memorial to President Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) presents a classical architectural monument to another august member of the American pantheon of civic gods. A sturdy structure strongly alluding to the Doric temples of ancient Greece, it was designed by architect Henry Bacon (1866–1924) and closely mirrors McKim's design from the McMillan Plan as a terminus for the western end of the National mall (figs.45 and 46).⁸⁹ Plans for a memorial to Lincoln had been in the works since shortly after his assassination in 1865, and in 1867 Congress established a commission for the monument's execution. Clark Mills, sculptor of the aforementioned monument to Andrew Jackson, was chosen to design the monument and proposed a tiered structure of stone rising to the northeast of the Capitol's north wing, decorated with thirty-six bronze statues and crowned by Lincoln writing the Emancipation Proclamation. Construction never commenced due to financial issues and plans for a memorial stalled until a bill passed in 1910 establishing a new commission; Bacon's design shortly followed. Drawing heavily on McKim's original design, though opting for an enclosed pavilion rather than an open colonnade. His intention for a solitary, colossal sculpture of Lincoln mirrors Phidias' lost statue of Zeus enthroned (ca. 430 BCE) in the Temple of Zeus at Olympia.⁹⁰ Bacon's design, referencing ancient Greek democracy rather than Roman empire, was somewhat at odds with its time: a post-Spanish-American War (1898) United States was leaning toward nationalism and expansionism. Having found a common enemy in Spain, north and south united (if only momentarily)

⁸⁹ Reps, *Monumental Washington*, 157–158.

⁹⁰ Thomas J. Brown, "The Great War and Civil War Memory," in *Civil War Monuments and the Militarization of America* (University of North Carolina Press, 2019), pp. 234–239.

behind the draw of increased power. Despite its democratic inspiration, the Lincoln Memorial's costly construction and immense scale speak to this spirit of empire.⁹¹



Figure 43: the Capitol axis terminus proposed by the Senate Parks Commission within the McMillan plan: a Doric colonnade overlooking the Reflecting Pool and Potomac River. The horses emerging from the pool seem to recall Apollo rising from his basin at Versailles. Photograph from the National Parks Service.

Groundbreaking on the Lincoln Memorial took place in 1914, and the monument was completed in 1922. Although its construction was interrupted by the entry of the United States into World War I in 1917, and slowed by similar bureaucratic speed bumps like its neighbor the Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial—once begun—came about in just eight years as opposed to the former's thirty-six. The simple rectangular structure is surrounded by fluted Doric columns and sits, as noted above, on an artificial rise on land reclaimed from the Potomac. This puts it at the same elevation as the Washington Monument, making both strong focal points along the National Mall. Compared to a classical Greek temple, the Lincoln Memorial departs considerably from

⁹¹ Gregory P. Downs, "The World the Civil War Might Have Made," in *The Second American Revolution: the Civil War-Era Struggle over Cuba and the Rebirth of the American Republic* (Chapel Hill, North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), pp. 95–106.

every known example in that it lacks pediments and its cella opens on the long side. But Bacon's unorthodox architectural innovations seemed designed to for maximum visual impact on the Mall, just as Louis XIV's fountains did in Versailles' gardens. The Lincoln Memorial closed the open west end of the Mall, which had represented the western ambitions of Manifest Destiny, with its strong horizontality, thick masonry, and perfect symmetry. This architectural boundary suggests national stability and permanence following the Reconstruction Era (1863–1877) and looking to the future. Its marble walls and columns embrace the colossal, 19-foot Georgia marble statue of Lincoln by sculptor Daniel Chester French (1850–1931), which projects a sense of stoic strength. To the right and left of Lincoln, who looks toward the Washington Monument, the northern and southern walls of the pavilion are etched with the Gettysburg and Second Inaugural Addresses, respectively. This north/south relationship, along with an inscription over the Lincoln statue's head that heralds him as savior of the union,⁹² a narrative confirmed materially in the use of stone from Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Massachusetts, Colorado, and Indiana.⁹³

The memorial and its inscriptions celebrate Lincoln as preserver of the Union, its Greek references and monumental scale suggesting immortality and mythological heroism, but conspicuously absent, in contrast to Clark Mills' 1867 proposal, is any explicit mention of the sixteenth president as emancipator, despite the two civil wartime speeches being engraved on the inner walls of the cella. This facet of the Lincoln

⁹² This viewpoint was not shared by many Southerners who saw the Civil War as a sugar-coated "War Between the States" or "War of Northern Aggression". This stigma lingers in some Southern communities today. For more on the Civil War's name and its implications, see Gaines M. Foster, "What's Not in a Name: The Naming of the American Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 8, no. 3 (2018): 440–444.

⁹³ "Construction of the Lincoln Memorial," National Parks Service (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2017), <https://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-memorial-construction.htm>.

Memorial reveals a darker side of the power of Washington's landscapes: the ability of those with wealth and political weight to dictate how history is told and retold. While Louis XIV could write his own biography and place in history into the landscape of Versailles to suit his personal vision, the stories of America's past—and of its heroes—captured in stone throughout Washington are those of an entire nation, or at least they purport to be. The failure of the Memorial Commission and designers to make mention of or reference to the slaves liberated by Lincoln or the continued struggle of their descendants to achieve equality under the law is a stark reminder of the underbelly of American social injustice and corruption. Nonetheless, culture-shifting events like African-American singer Marian Anderson's (1897–1993) 1939 performance and Martin Luther King Jr.'s (1929–1968) "I Have a Dream" speech as part of the March on Washington for Jobs (1963) took place on the memorial's steps, reclaiming some stolen power through the social production of space preserved for posterity in radio and television recordings (fig. 23).⁹⁴

No such events have taken place at Versailles: while Louis XIV's palace saw its fair share of protests, particularly around the French Revolution, it was never physically reclaimed by those who were stifled by the monarchy because it never belonged to them. Perhaps most comparable was the October March, or Women's March on Versailles of October 5th, 1789. It was a violent protest against Louis XVI's (1754–1793) monarchy and one of the earliest major events of the Revolution. A Parisian mob, stoked to fury by wildly inflated bread prices, stormed the palace, killing a pair of guards

⁹⁴ For an in-depth view of the Lincoln Memorial's relationship to African Americans and as platform for protest, see Scott A. Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939–1963," *The Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (1993): pp. 135–163, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2079700>.

and demanding the royal family return with them to Paris. They succeeded, and a nine-hour procession brought Marie Antoinette, Louis XVI, and their children to the abandoned Tuileries Palace. The difference between the October March and the March on Washington is that the former was simply an extradition—the mob did not make the palace theirs, instead returning with captives to their Parisian stronghold.⁹⁵ At the Lincoln Memorial, Civil Rights activists very intentionally occupied the very core of the Capital, using the hallowed space of Lincoln's throne room a backdrop for a cultural revolution. Though it was only theirs temporarily, media in the form of photography and video make the memory of their occupation immortal. Reclamation is the power of truly public space and the impact of Washington's belonging to the people: we can make that power ours, if only temporarily, to send a message to the world.

⁹⁵ Petr Alekseevich Kropotkin, *The Great French Revolution: 1789–1793* (New York, NY: Schocken Books, 1971), pp. 150–157.

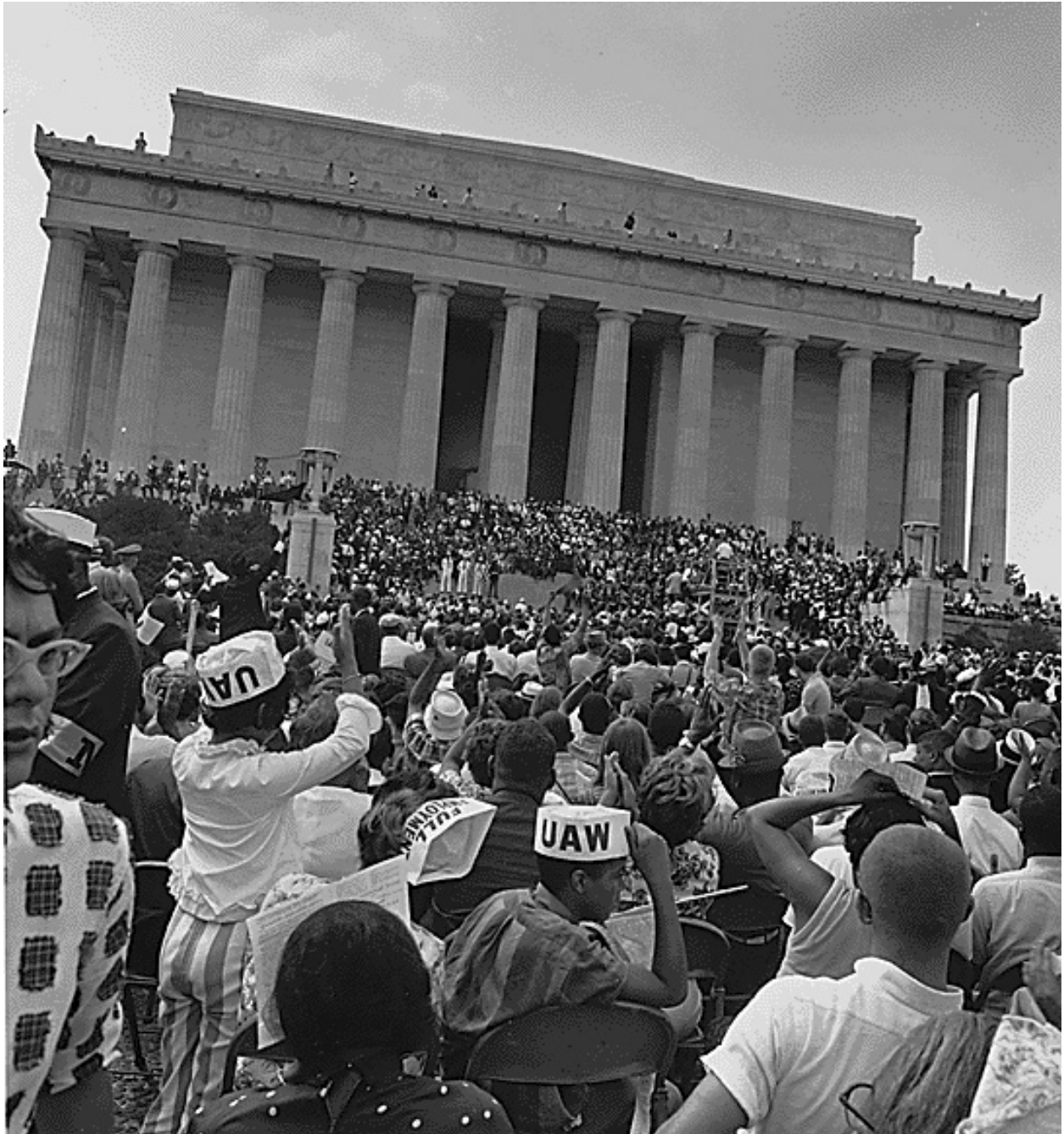


Figure 44: the Lincoln Memorial during the March on Washington for Jobs of 1963. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

Compared to the image of Lincoln sitting proudly in his chair, watching with grave determination over the grand vista of the Mall and protests on the steps of his temple, the Jefferson Memorial seems like a romantic idyll on its own island to the south of the Mall (figs. 22 and 27). While Jefferson was arguably the most influential founding father,

a term coined in 1916, no monument had yet been dedicated to him on or even near the Mall.⁹⁶ Conceived in 1901 by the Senate Parks Commission and illustrated within its McMillan Plan as a Pantheon to an array of important leaders of the United States (none were mentioned specifically), no action was taken to construct a monument on the site until a 1925 competition for a memorial dedicated solely to Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) which was won by John Russell Pope but never funded. In 1934, President Franklin Roosevelt (1882–1945) asked about the possibility of constructing a memorial on the site to Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826), who he deeply admired. In the same year, a commission to construct the memorial was created.

As a Roman counterpart to the Greek temple for Lincoln, the Jefferson Memorial as completed houses a colossal bronze statue of Jefferson (1947) by Beaux-Arts-trained Rudolph Evans (1878–1960) at the center of its open-air rotunda. John Russell Pope was selected to design the architecture of the memorial and oversaw a large portion of its design until his death in 1937. Eggers and Higgins took over for Pope, overseeing its construction from 1939–1943.⁹⁷ The domed structure of pure white marble is surrounded by trees like a garden folly at a great English country house, tranquil on the meandering lakeshore of the Tidal Basin (fig. 47). As such, it realizes, after a fashion, Downing's mid-nineteenth-century conception of the Mall as an English garden. But, while the monument may appear to be small and pavilion-like from the core of the National Mall, and smaller from still the White House, it is as monumentally scaled as the Lincoln Memorial, its neighbor to the northwest. The domed rotunda and

⁹⁶ Jill Lepore, *The Whites of Their Eyes: The Tea Party's Revolution and the Battle Over American History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 16.

⁹⁷ Reps, *Monumental Washington*, 173–176.

its rectangular portico directly reference the Pantheon in Rome (113–125 BCE) and fittingly the Rotunda at the University of Virginia (1822–1826) which Jefferson himself designed, but with the addition of an Ionic peristyle. Its Neoclassical form echoes Lincoln's Greek Revival temple, and both feature massive recreations of the men-turned-gods in stone and bronze.



Figure 45: the Jefferson Memorial's waterfront facade. Photograph from Wikimedia Commons.

At Versailles, Apollo represented the mythologized Louis XIV, but in the capital, the Founding Fathers and other heroes of American civic religion like Lincoln are just

larger-than-life, idealized versions of themselves, sublimated into Columbia, a personified ideal whose presence is felt but not hardly seen in Washington. Fountains and architectural elements enclose and enhance the figures of gods and mythological heroes. But they are not merely statues scattered about a field of green but rather they are ideas and claims celebrated with stone and water and feats of design and construction. They enliven the landscape through focal points, sound, and dramatic displays. The Tethys Grotto might be considered a more exuberant predecessor to the austere Lincoln Memorial, with seated central figures housed within massive pavilions. The Dragon Fountain's jet and the Washington Monument pierce the sky with pillars of white, triumphs of engineering meant to celebrate the figures they were built in honor to. In both Washington and Versailles, it is difficult to miss who the main characters are—they bear the mythology of both places boldly, and audiences delight in the glory (and fear) the spaces express. Power is certainly palpable in the individual elements, but the whole composition of both Washington and Versailles establish a potent mythology that continues to impact culture decades and centuries after their inception.

Power is a difficult concept to measure, but the iconographic programs of Versailles and Washington had an undeniable impact on their original audiences and continue to function as highly visible artifacts today. At Versailles, Apollonian imagery dominated not only the château and the gardens in the time of Louis XIV, but continues to permeate the publications, marketing, and events orchestrated and promoted by the French Ministry of Culture, which manages the palace and its programs. Apollo is the centerpiece of the palace's logo; the upper half of his gilded visage looms over a horizon formed by "*CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES*" like the sun on the infinite horizon

beyond the Grand Canal (fig. 48). The palace's commitment to restore the château and grounds to their state at the height of the Sun King's reign—as evidenced by the controversial restoration of the *Grille du Roi* with its sixteen Apollo faces—is further proof of the indivisibility of the King, Louis XIV, with his mythology as the god of the sun. He reigns over the perfectly pruned gardens and gilded rooflines, offering glory to friends and fear to foes, guarding the legacy of a long-dead monarchy.



Figure 46: The Palace of Versailles' logo.

Washington is quite a different situation. It is a living city, not exclusively a carefully reserved relic of a bygone era. It evolved, though slowly, and its mythological program evolved with it. Eighty years—a lifetime—passed between *Freedom* taking her perch on the Capitol dome and Jefferson's supersized figure in bronze standing under the dome of his Pantheon. As Washington's iconography developed, a loose narrative of goddesses of liberty and freedom, venerable founding fathers, and god-sized leaders took shape. Whether the amalgamation of these figures is called Columbia or Patriotism or the American Spirit does not matter; their power is still palpable. Their half-worship realizes a collective belief in certain "American" virtues like freedom, justice, self-reliance, and perseverance sometimes in the face of grim odds. When compared to

Versailles' Apollonian imagery, the American icons seem only to exude glory, forgoing fear—at face value, at least—and setting them apart from Louis XIV's. But Washington is not free of fear for every citizen and inhabitant. It runs like an undercurrent in the tainted, often glossed-over darker sides of American history.

From the time of country's founding, anyone who is not a white, heterosexual, cisgender, and arguably Protestant male has likely found, at least from time to time, that the United States is not the land of the free, a place of liberty and opportunity and redemption. The monuments and memorials of Washington primarily celebrate the "main characters" of American history: the white men. In the primary phase of Washington's planning and development, from L'Enfant's 1791 master plan to the Senate Parks Commission's 1901 McMillan Plan, neither women nor African-Americans nor Native Americans were honored with a monument, memorial, or museum, despite significant contributions to the country. Adding to the insult have been the egregious acts committed against racial minorities not just by the country as a whole but by the very men celebrated in the capital—from Washington and Jefferson, who were slaves owners until their death, to Andrew Jackson, who was responsible for the forced removal of thousands of Native Americans east of the Mississippi River.⁹⁸ Beneath many carefully-carved, perfectly cast, artfully preserved monuments and memorials in Washington, icons of ancient and recent mythology help facilitate the oppression and corruption that, for those who are alert to injustices in society, saturate public space, but largely in secret. The monuments plate sin with gold, painting false histories of pure

⁹⁸ Alfred A. Cave, "Abuse of Power: Andrew Jackson and the Indian Removal Act of 1830," *The Historian* 65, no. 6 (2003): 1330–1353.

heroic valor, telling part-truths that might otherwise spark critical conversations about our nation's past that might guide it toward a more careful future.

EPILOGUE

The irony of Versailles and Washington's similarities dissipates upon close inspection of their imperial ambitions. Though the United States citizens have never knelt to a king, they were not and are not free of corrupt leaders. Themes of glory and fear common in Versailles' Apollonian imagery are mirrored in Washington, though masked behind pristine facades of stone, not transparently displayed through stories as allegorical warnings. When gazing upon the walls of the Jefferson Memorial, how should one take away any message besides the man's greatness and his immortality in bronze? Is there is a palpable cruelty behind the beauty and commanding presence of these spaces, particularly for those who do not share the privilege of white skin with these men? The messages the memorials send do not acknowledge the heroes' flaws along with their triumphs. Perhaps Washington's lack of transparency is more nefarious than Louis XIV's barely concealed threats.

As citizens and visitors walk through the landscape of the American capital, they find no disclaimers on Washington's monuments for the racial and cultural erasures these objects and buildings represent, all in the interest of communicating a national narrative of triumph over adversity. The Washington Memorial does not include a placard stating "this man, though important to the founding of this nation, was a slaveowner."⁹⁹ The Lincoln Memorial is free of any mention of slavery at all nor do its inscriptions specify that though Lincoln's ideas about race and slavery were progressive for his time, he did state his belief that African Americans were morally and intellectually

⁹⁹ Kenneth Morgan, "George Washington and the Problem of Slavery." *Journal of American Studies* 34, no. 2 (2000): 281–282.

inferior to whites.¹⁰⁰ Thomas Jefferson's pantheon of marble is not marred by his likely repeated rape of his teenage slave, Sally Hemings (1773–1835). The 30-year age gap between the two, along with the social status of Miss Hemings as Jefferson's property, indicate that this relationship was nonconsensual in the sense that legal consent is understood today.¹⁰¹ An argument on the morality or lack thereof exhibited by the men at the center of America's mythology is well beyond the scope of this research, but, at the time of their creation, the absent or forgotten discourse around if or how they should be venerated in public space is further evidence of the immense power of landscape and classical memorials to shape our collective historical narrative.

Irony pervades many of Washington's monuments. The *Statue of Freedom's* fringed drape and "Indian" headdress were designed at a time when Native Americans were being displaced from their homes and forced onto reservations; never mind that the Capitol itself and the rest of the nation was built on land they never ceded to the United States. George Washington and Thomas Jefferson's shrines celebrate their contributions to "liberty" without acknowledging that this freedom excluded anyone who was not a white male. At Versailles, this is not the case. Louis XIV certainly wove illusions into his palace and gardens, but they all candidly revolve around narrating his glory or instilling fear in potential enemies and emasculating the nobility. The danger to

¹⁰⁰ J. Blaine Hudson, "Abraham Lincoln: An African American Perspective," *The Register of the Kentucky Historical Society* 106, no. 3/4 (2008): 514–519.

¹⁰¹ If a woman did not have the right to refuse, then consent was legally speaking meaningless. She was approximately sixteen years old at the time of her first pregnancy, and had six children, all likely fathered by Jefferson. Jefferson's paternity is not uncontested, but a comprehensive report by the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, which includes DNA and historical evidence, strongly indicates a sexual relationship between Jefferson and Hemings. See "Conclusions of Report of the Monticello Research Committee on Thomas Jefferson and Sally Hemings," Monticello, 2000, <https://www.monticello.org/thomas-jefferson/jefferson-slavery/thomas-jefferson-and-sally-hemings-a-brief-account/research-report-on-jefferson-and-hemings/conclusions/>.

contemporary audiences is minimal: few walk away from Versailles believing the Sun King was a champion of anything other than himself and the State—which was also him.¹⁰² But, whatever design and planning principles Versailles and Washington share have been transmogrified by the American historical context. In Washington, a culture that still deeply honors slaveholding Founding Fathers without reservation makes monuments without caveats dangerous in a country where racism remains a mortal threat. An honest history of these men would be a sound addition to their monuments and would provide a means for cultural unification without burying their egregious acts under classical monuments. One of Jefferson's own descendants has suggested taking down the Jefferson Memorial altogether or reclaiming it for liberators like Harriet Tubman.¹⁰³ Perhaps such reclamations are necessary for using landscapes of power for a morally just and superior ideology. How do we remember and honor our history with a particularity that commends the good and condemns the objectively wrong? In public spaces and on historic, visually arresting monuments, there are no simple solutions. But we must try.

Louis XIV was not innocent of abuses of power. He threw the lives of his soldiers away like twigs to a fire, fighting wars of vanity and conscripting them into wasteful construction projects. He dumped exorbitant amounts of money into Versailles, a temple to his own glory, when most of his subjects were impoverished, class-constrained peasantry with no title and no hope to climb the social ladder. His largely successful

¹⁰² It is debated whether Louis XIV ever literally said "*L'Etat c'est a moi*", or "I am the state," but his politics indicate a level of truth to the statement. For more, see Herbert H. Rowen, "'L'Etat C'est a Moi': Louis XIV and the State," *French Historical Studies* 2, no. 1 (1961): p. 83, <https://doi.org/10.2307/286184>.

¹⁰³ Lucian K. Truscott, "I'm a Direct Descendant of Thomas Jefferson. Take Down His Memorial.," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, July 6, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/07/06/opinion/thomas-jefferson-memorial-truscott.html>.

efforts to hamstring the nobility put France economically behind other nations such as England and the United States on the eve of the Industrial Revolution. As with the Washington's flawed figures, once could excuse Louis XIV's evils as a product of his time and position, but his narrative at Versailles is finished—just a relic. His reign is viewed as feeding the history of French nationalism—the greatness achieved under certain kings on the European stage—but monarchy can be safely assigned to the “adolescent” phase of a now mature republic. Washington, a living, growing city, is a physical translation of parts of America's history. In 2020, when truth itself is up for debate, it is more important than ever to clearly illustrate our history without smoothing over its ugly parts as the Washington, Jefferson, and Lincoln memorials do.

Washington, Stained

A discussion on the power of landscape in Washington and its intersection with truth and history warrants exploration of the wildly divisive (and at the time of this paper's completion, recently voted out of office) Donald Trump (born 1946), 45th president of the United States.

Late in the winter of 2020, a draft executive order titled “Making Federal Buildings Beautiful Again” leaked. Its name echoed Trump's “Make America Great Again” slogan, and its contents laid the groundwork for throwing out the U.S. General Service Administration's Design Excellence Program, which ensures federal buildings are adequate and of high design quality, communities are on board with construction, and

that no official style is implemented.¹⁰⁴ The mandate, if signed, would have scrubbed the policy, and made classical styles mandatory for new and renovated federal buildings. Architects, critics, academics, and organizations—including the Institute of Classical Architecture and Art—spoke against the order, pointing to ties with fascism and low-quality classical buildings usually resulting from tight federal budgets. The former point is significant: Benito Mussolini (1883–1945), Francisco Franco (1892–1975), and Adolf Hitler (1889–1945) implemented state architecture derived from Greece and Rome in their fascist regimes, formalizing their governments’ domination over the very fabric of public space.¹⁰⁵¹⁰⁶ Such a move in the United States, land of liberty, would be an insult to the ideals of progress and democracy as well as a sweeping display of how power can and has been displayed through landscapes.¹⁰⁷ The message the executive order sends is that the one man, even if he is elected by the Electoral College, decides how public space is formed. Classical buildings have never denoted only republican and democratic ideals, but rather the style has historically accommodated autocratic and imperialistic impulses equally well. In the hands of a particular regime—one that declines to condemn white supremacists, blatantly commits nepotism, and sows fear and disinformation—it is a means to accrue power. Thankfully, the executive order has not been signed, and it is unclear if it ever will be. But its mere

¹⁰⁴ “Guiding Principles for Federal Architecture,” GSA, August 13, 2017, <https://www.gsa.gov/real-estate/design-construction/design-excellence/design-excellence-program/guiding-principles-for-federal-architecture>.

¹⁰⁵ Diane Yvonne Ghirardo, “Italian Architects and Fascist Politics: An Evaluation of the Rationalist’s Role in Regime Building,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 39, no. 2 (1980): 109-127

¹⁰⁶ Paul B. Jaskot, *The Architecture of Oppression* (London: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ Julie Lasky, “Why Classicists Are Against Trump’s Draft Executive Order,” *Architectural Digest*, 2020, <https://www.architecturaldigest.com/story/why-classicists-are-against-trump-draft-executive-order>.

existence demonstrates that public space is a theatre of power, and those seeking control will use it malevolently if the people do not push back.

In weeks that followed George Floyd's murder at the hands of the Minneapolis police officers on May 25th, 2020, millions of protestors took to the streets to demand justice not just for Mr. Floyd but for the countless black lives taken by police officers in recent years. One such protest filled Lafayette Square on the evening of June 1st, 2020. While Donald Trump addressed the nation from the Rose Garden at the White House, threatening to deploy the National Guard to "dominate the streets," law enforcement officers began forcing protestors back, launching tear gas and flash bangs into the crowd, violently dispersing the otherwise peaceful protest. Minutes later, accompanied by cameras and an entourage of aides, Trump emerged through the gates of the White House, walked to the just-cleared square, and posed for photography with a Bible (held upside-down) in front of the historic St. John's Episcopal Church. The scene was blatantly theatrical, a mostly-wordless display demonstrating that the landscape belonged to him, and an impactful (if frightening) message that the nation's capital—the peoples' capital—belonged to him. The choreographed, highly inflammatory publicity stunt was a venomous lesson on power in the landscape. Its setting in Washington and wide media coverage made its impact far-reaching.¹⁰⁸

All too easily one can imagine Louis XIV executing similar performances in the forecourts of Versailles, surrounded by icons of his glory and fear, commanding the vast and insurmountable landscape of his palace like a god. The Sun King was well aware of the land's power and used it to his advantage, elegantly and ruthlessly staging actual

¹⁰⁸ Jill Colvin, "Tear Gas, Threats for Protesters before Trump Visits Church," AP NEWS (Associated Press, June 2, 2020), <https://apnews.com/article/15be4e293cdebe72c10304fe0ec668e4>.

plays in his gardens. These productions might be considered more veiled, delightful predecessors to Trump's stark proto-fascist display in the executive mansion's pleasure garden, Lafayette Square. Modern would-be monarchs like Donald Trump know, whether subliminally or through precedent, that occupying space which belongs to the people communicates control and domination over them. Over us. It is our duty to know the history and importance of our public spaces and their narratives so as to avoid such domination.

Sunset on Two Empires

As the burning disk of the sun sends golden rays skittering over Versailles' Grand Canal, and as the dying light of dusk paints the western façade of the château a brilliant tangerine, the center of Louis XIV's inconceivable power comes to life. When hordes of tourists in sneakers and camera straps having dispersed, one can imagine the glory of the place at the height of the Sun King's reign, picture lace-trimmed courtiers milling about in lavender twilight. The colossal geometries laid out by Le Notre and icons of glory and fear fade into blue dark, but only for the night. Each morning, as the sun rises and illuminates the king's bedchamber at the center of the eastern façade, and as thousands of tourists fill the Cour d'Honneur, Louis XIV's palace and gardens are filled with life. Gone is the fear impressed upon the Sun King's nobility; only glory remains. With all the pomp and glamour of its creator, Versailles fills its visitors with awe through commanding control of the land and intricate, layered, artfully sculpted iconography. The Sun King's power may no longer be political, but it lives on, astounding fresh faces

from the farthest reaches of the earth, with the grace of Apollo and the certainty of the sun.

The same light fades over Washington just a few hours later. L'Enfant's boulevards flicker to life, brilliant geometries radiating out like sun beams, bringing order to the vastness of space. *Freedom* is floodlit on her Capitol perch; her neighbors Lincoln and Jefferson glow as well, beacons of white against dark night, mirrored in reflecting pools and tidal basins. The Washington Monument towers over all, a bolt of lightning plunged into the banks of the Potomac. The city is alive, bustling around its icons in cars and on bikes and sidewalks. Washington itself is a landscape of power: the mall and its luminous monuments are pinpoints of particular importance along diagonal streets. The capital is a center of political power for the world, underpinned by its historic landscape. But what will happen when this is no longer the case?

When the sun sets on the American empire, what will become of the landscape into which so much history has been inscribed and denied? Will the Capitol remain? Will it become a new Palace of Versailles, a vestige of a beautiful and cruel era lost to time? Will the National Mall become the Gardens? The Reflecting Pool the Grand Canal? Will visitors gaze upon our forefathers in bronze and marble, questioning our deification of such flawed men? Surely they will stare up at the pinnacle of Washington's obelisk and wonder how such a power was lost, then remember that all empires have a lifespan, and all great men fade beneath history's ever-rising tide.

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